

new zealand gardener

MARCH 2015

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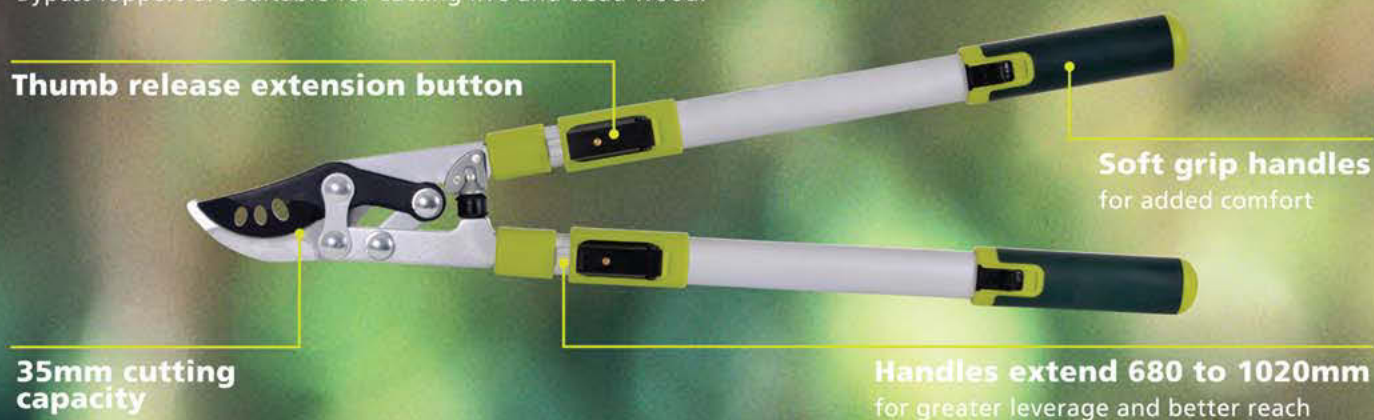
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PHOTO: SALLY TAGG



*"A flower does not
compete with the
other flower next to
it. It just blooms"*

Koshin Ogui



When we were celebrating *NZ Gardener's* 70th birthday a few months ago, we looked back through a lot of the old archival issues. There are many things that are markedly different about the magazine now, viz this little snippet from an advertisement in one of the earliest issues: "2, 4-D is the fastest, easiest and surest method of clearing weeds from bowling greens, tennis courts, parks and lawns. Order a tin today!" Or this example, another advertisement from around the same period: "An insecticide for the control of white butterfly and other insects... now 50 per cent DDT!"

Another thing I noticed on perusing the back issues was how much space had been devoted to covering competitive plant shows. There were pages of results from shows all over the country and screeds of advice about growing "flowers for the bench". Almost all of it was clearly aimed at men who, for the most part, were the ones competing. Plenty of them were competing too; we reported in a news story that there were 738 chrysanthemums entered in the 1959 National Chrysanthemum Show.

There are still flower shows of course, but they have rather fallen out of favour with the gardening public, and entries now number in the dozens rather than the hundreds. I was talking to Kiwi-based plant breeding great Dr Keith Hammett, who has been showing flowers since he was just 15, and he said a recent North Island dahlia show at which he judged was the smallest it had ever been. Normanby gardener Spud Brogden told me the very first North Island and West Coast Gladiolus Society annual show in 1956 had 496 glads on display. This year, Spud told me, there were just shy of 200 blooms in the show – which doesn't sound too bad, until Spud told me they had been grown by just three active competitors, "whereas we used to have more than 20 people who were growing glads for the purpose of showing them there".

"The decline in people taking part in flower shows is something we have been giving considerable attention to," Keith told me. "There are only elderly people involved, and there are no young people coming through. But in the years I have been showing, our lifestyles have changed out of all recognition, and flower shows are a victim of that."

Amazingly enough, Spud himself has participated in every single Normanby gladioli show – next January will be his 60th, as well as the 60th anniversary of the event. He admits it might be the last show and is keen for it to go out with a bang. With this in mind, Spud wants to hear from any former members of the society who'd be interested in competing in 2016 and can offer them free corms to grow for the event (if you are a ex-member, email Spud on brogdenbulbs@xtra.co.nz). The free corms are available only to past members, but the competition is open to all, so do show up with your best gladioli blooms and see if you can impress the judges. Spud admits he has his eye on the top prize himself though: "At the first gladioli show in 1956, my father was still alive and we were showing together. We managed to win the award for the Champion Bloom of the Show. I'd like to win that again next year."

Even if you don't want to compete, it's well worth checking out your local flower show. If you have never been to one, you will be amazed at the skill and artistry on display. There are usually plants for sale at very reasonable prices (often ones that are no longer commercially produced) but more importantly, you will meet gardeners with a wealth of experience that they are only too happy to share. And when it comes to inspiration, nothing beats seeing what other gardeners can do and I don't see that changing any time soon. Have a great month in the garden!

Jo

Jo McCarroll

Mailbox



HERE'S ONE WE MADE EARLIER!

My eagerly awaited copy of the February NZ Gardener arrived today, and other tasks went on hold while I sat down to read it.

Imagine my surprise and delight when I came to the DIY project, a garden gate featuring vintage tools.

Check out the gate my husband made for me last weekend – we call it a tribute to early New Zealand life. Great minds must think alike? But I love yours too, so I am now planning a garden-themed one. Vicky Alexander, WAINUIOMATA

OOOPS! I MADE A SILLY MISTAKE

This season I did a stupid thing: I put mouldy compost on the tomato plants in the glasshouse. I did know better, but I thought it would be OK. It wasn't. Within a week I noticed mould beginning on my tomato plants. I started spraying with a spray for moulds and fungus; it worked short term but needed to be repeated.

But as the tomatoes started forming I hesitated to use a chemical treatment on edible plants. Then, in January's magazine, Southland columnist Robert Guyton suggested using baking soda or vinegar to treat these infections.

I decided to start with baking soda and see if there was any effect. It stopped the mould in its tracks! Now I spot spray just to treat any small patches that occur on the new growth.

Although the plants don't look great, they are still producing well and I know the spray is safe. And yes, I will be more careful in the future! This is one lesson learned well.

I have only been gardening for six years. All I know comes from NZ Gardener and people tell me I have green fingers! I particularly like Robert's common sense approach. Because we live near Dunedin, his column is always the first I read. Margaret Anderson, BRIGHTON



I HAD A SUCCULENT SURPRISE

I always enjoy reading in your magazine about what other clever folk do – never dreaming that I would have anything to show myself. But check out this lovely flower from a succulent that's been outside my glass house for a year or so. Colleen Davies, WHANGAREI

MELIA TREES? NOT FOR ME!

In February, Russell Fransham wrote that the melia was a lovely tree and a good option for small gardens. I agree the *Melia azedarach* has a delicious spring perfume and offers good shade in summer... but that is it! I have one at my place, and it has outgrown its welcome. The bead-like yellow berries smell of cat pee when wet and the leafless sticks accumulate everywhere they're not wanted. He says they're good for birds, but in the 20 years I have lived here I have seen one wood pigeon, and it died! In my opinion, melias are no good for small gardens, but would look lovely in the middle of a paddock where their flowers, berries and million and a half leaves won't block the gutters. Diane Fussell, NAPIER



CHECK OUT MY BRAND NEW ROSE

I've dabbled with rose seed for years and have struck one or two good ones. This red and yellow seedling popped up a few years ago and is making a great show now. The only bad thing I could say about it is it has only a very faint scent. I called it 'Surprise' as that's just what it was.

Marjorie Watts, KAITAIA

WANT TO USE UP A GLUT CROP?

Editor Jo asked for recipes for her excess harvests, so here's my Courgette Bisque. I used to freeze raw courgettes in 700g-lots but found it made the soup taste watery so now I make the soup and freeze it in ice cream containers. I did try bottling it one year to save freezer space; I made a double batch and the bottles sealed well. But the next week there was a yeasty smell in the pantry and to my horror the lids had been popped off by foaming courgette soup! So now I am back to freezing it again.

Ingredients: 50g butter, 1 medium onion, finely chopped, 700g courgettes, 2½ cups chicken stock, ¼ teaspoon nutmeg, 1 teaspoon basil, salt and pepper to taste, 1 cup cream (optional).

Melt butter, fry finely chopped onion until soft, add sliced courgettes with stock, cover and simmer 20 minutes until tender. Whizz with stick blender, add nutmeg, salt, pepper and cream if using. Heat through.

I also make soup with yellow courgettes. Soften sliced courgettes in oil, add chicken stock, turmeric and basmati rice, and simmer until rice is tender.

Lisa Van Noordt, POKENO



LOOK AT OUR BRILLIANT BULBS

Last year we planted 100 garlic cloves and check out the result: we harvested 94 fat bulbs! We fed them with sheep pellets and plenty of worm wee so it was a fairly low cost operation. Not too bad for a second-year garden in a paddock!

They are currently drying off, threaded through gaps in a pallet. Now we just need to work out what to do with them all!

Crushed garlic is a favourite at our house but we might just try our hand at pickling some after reading your seasonal preserve pickled garlic recipe in the January issue.

Melanie Hopkins, HUNTLY

I AM SO PROUD OF MY GARLIC

I've had a great harvest this year for the first time. I decided to try planting the cloves a month earlier than the shortest day. They went in a raised bed, enriched with my own compost with added sheep pellets, and were kept weed-free and watered. They did try to flower, but I chopped the blooms off and harvested them in January. I couldn't believe my eyes when I dug them up, they were huge. I will plant a month earlier again this year. Don't despair if you've failed in the past, keep at it and you will succeed eventually.

Carol Harland, INVERCARGILL



MY MONSTER MULTIHEADED LILY

A friend of mine suggested I send this photo to you. It's a lily which has decided to grow very strangely. I live in Ohau, near Levin, and have had it for around four years. It was grown from seed, but not by me. In the second year it grew with a flat stem and has widened each year since. I couldn't believe this year. The stem has curved at the top into a semi circle and I stopped counting the flower heads at 300! It's 150cm tall, 5cm at the base of the stem and 30cm at the top. I hope you find it interesting.

Christine Ayres, OHAU

This is an example of what's called fasciation, when stems grow abnormally, usually after damage to the growing tip. The enlarged stem looks like several stems joined together. It happens to other plants too, especially echiums. It's not that unusual and can occur if insect damage, frost, viral infection, wind or mechanical damage occurs causing the growing cells at the tip to divide abnormally. It's usually limited to one stem and doesn't usually recur the following season. However, conditions seem to favour fasciation this year as we've been receiving photos of examples from all around the country.

Barbara Smith, NZ Gardener

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Jenny has a Bachelor of Horticulture from Massey and has worked in commercial garden design for many years. Jenny's garden in Manaia has been rated a five-star garden by the NZ Gardens Trust since 2005 and her hanging baskets are always a stand-out attraction at the Taranaki garden festival.



March 12 – 6pm • Palmer's New Plymouth

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outside thinking

GROW YOUR OWN

What to sow and plant; grape vine care;
Koanga's self-sufficiency project; hazelnuts;
boozy apricots and a chicken tractor to build



HOMEGROWN
30 PAGES OF
EXPERT
ADVICE
every month

WHAT TO SOW & PLANT

Gardening by the moon

Robert Guyton's guide to planting and sowing in harmony with the lunar cycle

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
30 	31	COLOUR CODING KEY  Sow and plant  Cultivate only  Barren period  Sow root crops	 The year starts with a whirl of activity or at least sowing seed. January 1st is the beginning of the first quarter moon, so sow peas and leary plants.		1 March 1 & 2 are good for sowing seed and planting seedlings of plants with edible leaves.	
2 	3  Feed liquid fertiliser to established plants on the 3rd & 4th.	4	5	6  Full Moon 12:09pm	7	8
9  Sow root crops, such as onions and radish on the 9th & 10th.		11	12	13	14  Last Quarter	15 
16 17 Sow root crops, and grass seed if you want to establish a lawn, on the 16th & 17th. If you want to apply a homemade organic spray, do it over these two days.		18 	19	20  New Moon 12:47pm	21	22
23 	24	25	26	27  First Quarter	28	29 
March 24-31 is as prolific as you'd like it to be – get active and sow more leafy vegetable crops in preparation for winter. Try spinach and more silverbeet, both sure-fire cool-weather crops.						

THIS MONTH...



Sow beetroot

• It still feels warm, but summer is over.

That's not all bad news – you can start sowing and planting the edibles you'll need to get through winter. Beetroot, radishes and carrots can all go in now, and you can plant brassica seedlings everywhere too. You could even sow these slow-growing winter staples from seed up north, although protect the seedlings (whether grown from seed or not) from the rapacious white cabbage butterfly, which will still be on the wing. Spinach and silverbeet can be sown and planted now too, as can most Asian greens; these are very fast-growing so if you plant seedlings now you should be eating them before winter comes. It might be traditional to wait until April, but why not sow a few peas and broad beans? In warmer areas you might get a shoulder season crop in late autumn/early winter, but no matter if you don't – your plants should be well-established before wintry weather slows growth, so they'll start bearing like mad as soon as it warms up.

• Autumn means everything sets seed –

including weeds! Keep on top of them at this time of year, or you'll only have yourself to blame. In small spaces, try using boiling water directly on especially pernicious specimens, or Yates have a new Zero Rapid Gel you can apply directly on to a target.

• Save edible seed for spices and snacks.

Autumn is seed-saving time, so dry and store seed from all your best and most productive tomatoes, beans, peppers and the like (I've written about how to collect seed from cross-pollinating cucurbits in the edible Q&A on page 40). Remember you can use seed in your cooking, so collect your fennel, dill, mustard and coriander seed to use whole or ground in the kitchen. I wanted to try saving poppy seed too to sprinkle on homemade bagels, but after some research, I'm still not sure whether all varieties have edible seeds. I did learn however that opium poppies all have edible seed – the grey seed has the best flavour, while white seed is nuttier and blue-grey harsher tasting – but it's probably best not to consume them as it can give a false-positive in a drug test! I might not risk it.



Seed fever

• Fill in empty spaces with cover crops.

This is especially important if you have a small garden, and can't adhere to a strict policy of crop rotation. Certain crops take different nutrients from the soil, so if you use one patch of dirt again and again for one thing, those nutrients run out and soil structure starts to break down. A cover crop, which is dug in before it starts to flower, adds organic matter, brings in good fungi and bacteria, helps soil retain water and stops weeds colonising empty spaces.



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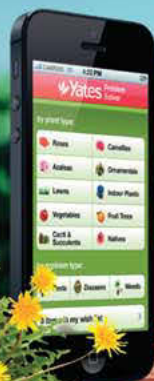
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BROOM

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WHAT WEED IS THAT?

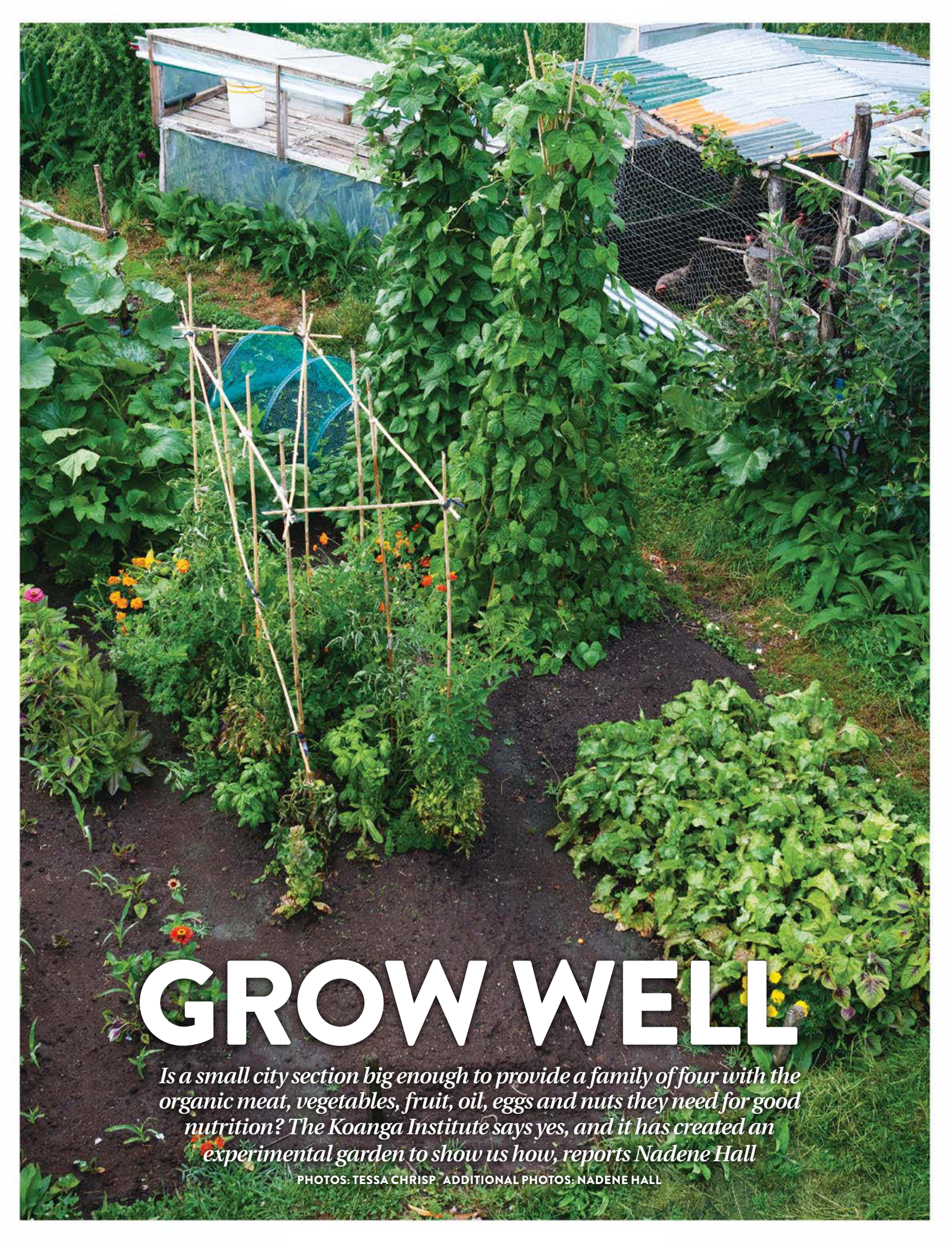
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EDIBLE GARDEN

Kay Baxter of Koanga
Institute; opposite: beans
twirl up the teepees in
the 200m² test garden.





GROW WELL

Is a small city section big enough to provide a family of four with the organic meat, vegetables, fruit, oil, eggs and nuts they need for good nutrition? The Koanga Institute says yes, and it has created an experimental garden to show us how, reports Nadene Hall

PHOTOS: TESSA CHRISP. ADDITIONAL PHOTOS: NADENE HALL



According to a food cost survey by Otago University, an average family, eating a moderately priced diet, will chew through around \$350 worth of food each week

So how much space would you need to grow that food yourself? Well, according to the results of a trial run by the seed-saving charity Koanga Institute on its property near Wairoa, you'd just need an average-sized backyard of about 200m² – that's roughly an area 14m by 14m – to produce enough food to feed your family a high-quality diet...and that includes meat. The results from the Urban Garden trial, Koanga's founder Kay Baxter believes, could save Kiwis money on their food bill and deliver a healthier, more nutritionally dense diet.

The garden came about as a result of a brainstorming session by the Koanga Institute's permaculture design students in 2013. They wanted to create the ultimate self-sufficient garden, which would provide the nutrition requirements outlined by Weston A Price in his influential 1939 book *Nutrition and Human Degeneration*. Price was a dentist who spent years trying to find out what was the ultimate in nutritious diets. He looked at his own patients and discovered that their health was declining as the food production process became more industrialised. He then devised his own research project and travelled the world studying indigenous groups who were still eating their traditional foods. He found that despite their very different diets – some ate lots of meat, for example, and some were vegetarian – they were much more healthy, and getting vastly more minerals and vitamins in their diet than people in Western nations. Two things the indigenous diets had in common was their high levels of fat-soluble Vitamin A and calcium (you can still buy Weston A Price's book – the Koanga Institute has it for sale on their website, koanga.org.nz – or you can read it for free on the Project Gutenberg Australia website, gutenberg.net.au).

The plan

Koanga decided to create a garden that would deliver Price's optimal diet for an average family. Their urban garden plan can be adjusted for any climate or soil, but in their experiment they based it on these parameters:

- Size: 200m²
- Start-up budget: \$2000
- Climate: cold in winter (up to 20 frosts ranging from -1°C to -5°C each year), hot and dry in summer
- Annual rainfall: 1600mm

- Soil: free-draining sandy loam
- Time commitment needed: weekends and some evenings during summer
- Time to full production: three to five years
- Yearly production: \$2500 worth of vegetables, fruit, nuts, meat and oil

To achieve the dietary recommendations of the Weston A Price diet, the garden is designed to provide the basics, as well as crucial minerals and vitamins:

- Nutrient-dense fresh vegetables and fruit on a daily basis, year-round, and dried fruit out of season
- olive oil and pickled olives for daily use to provide critical traditional fats
- nuts and oil on a regular basis, again to provide fats
- rabbit meat, including liver once or twice a week, plus bone broth daily using all rabbits parts, providing vitamin A and minerals
- eggs on a daily basis, plus some chicken, for vitamin A, protein and fats

The garden

Some 40m² of the garden is planted in vegetables. The beds are around 8m long by 1.2m deep with the rows running north to south. Koanga uses the biointensive method of tillage, which creates very light and fluffy soil that sits quite a bit higher than the paths next to the beds. "All the beds are double-dug," says Koanga Institute garden tutor Mel Turnbull. "The difference between the path and the bed is air, pretty much." The garden is fed on compost made up of weeds, excess greens and household scraps that have been processed by the resident flock of chickens, plus a worm tea from the garden's worm farm.

Koanga grows its own range of heritage vegetables, choosing the most nutritious varieties such as 'Red Kuri' and 'Delicata' pumpkins and Welsh bunching onions, and those that crop most heavily such as cabbages, silverbeet and lettuce. For best use of the tight space, kumara, water chestnuts, water cress and potatoes are grown in box garden beds, and tomatoes, basil, peppers and herbs are in wicking beds. All of the area outside the vege garden is planted with dynamic accumulators – plants with deep tap roots that draw up nutrients from the subsoil, store them in their leaves, which then break down to enrich the soil.



The garden is fed on compost made up of weeds, greens and household scraps processed by the resident flock of chickens.

HEN PAIS

Koanga has Legbar chickens – one rooster and eight hens – but if you live in an area where roosters are not allowed, you don't need one. Instead, buy in chicks, pullets or fertile eggs to hatch replacement birds every few years.

The hens are penned in a covered run that sits on a compost heap. They eat weeds and leftover greens, which get turned into compost. Grain is scattered to encourage the birds to turn it over and assist the composting process.

The end goal is to grow all the feed the chickens need within the garden, including worms from the worm farm under the rabbits, larvae from a soldier fly farm, greens from the ground cover outside and most critically, decomposers living in the compost. Until the system is in full swing, however, Koanga is buying organic whole grains, and feeding the birds a poultry mineral mix and seaweed meal.

NZ White/California
White rabbits live in
large cages suspended
above a worm farm.

THE RABBITS

For a long time Kay Baxter followed a vegetarian diet but after reading Weston A Price's book, she now believes there is an important role for a meat-producing animal in a garden and in a person's weekly diet.

Resident in Koanga's urban garden are NZ White/California White cross rabbits, which grow quickly, reaching 2.5kg in less than 20 weeks. That's a slightly slower growth rate than average because Koanga only feeds its animals on plants from the garden and foraged tagasaste, or tree lucerne, rather than expensive commercial pellets.

Koanga tutor Mel Turnbull says ideally you'd be able to find everything you need for the rabbits within the garden itself, "whereas we're harvesting [the tagasaste] from outside this particular garden. But if you wanted to try it at home, we think you could find the food they need by harvesting from parks. And they're eating lots from our herbal ley under the fruit trees here – maybe on your front lawn you'd have a herbal ley planted for them too."

The rabbits live in hanging cages in a sheltered part of the garden. All food waste, urine and poo drops into a worm farm sitting below. This is on an angle so "worm wee" runs off into a bucket for use as fertiliser.

There is also a moveable cage that can hold eight rabbits and be used on the grassy area, but Koanga is now using that to breed fast-growing guinea pigs, also destined for the table.

According to Weston A Price's research, a nutritious diet contains some meat. At Koanga, rabbit meat is an important source of protein. Rabbit liver has high levels of vitamin A, and a broth made from the bones also provides essential levels of calcium.



Grassy paths run around the garden but there's not a single centimetre of this garden that is wasted on lawn. Instead, the paths include chicory, comfrey, alfalfa, yarrow and other greens that provide high-quality feed for the rabbits, chickens and guinea pigs, as well as extra bulk for the compost.

Even so, the Koanga team need to use additional feed for the rabbits and chickens – they forage for it from their surroundings. If you want to replicate this garden at home, Koanga suggest looking for foraging opportunities in nearby parks or neighbour's gardens (with permission!) especially in the first year or two as your vegetable garden comes up to full production.

Fruit & nuts

Fruit and nut trees make up just over a quarter of the garden. There are 35 different berry, grape, fruit and nut trees here, mostly planted around the edges, all of which are heritage varieties saved by Koanga over the past 30 years. There were two mature fruit trees – a lemon and a mandarin

– but full production from the rest of the trees will take up to five years.

The key things to remember if you plan to plant this many trees in a small space is:

- Look for trees grafted onto dwarf rootstock – most reach only about 2m.
- Prune trees into espaliers and cordons to use the available vertical spaces effectively without blocking sunlight to the rest of the garden – at Koanga that even includes a trellis above the rabbit cages.
- Use boundary fences and structures as frames for berries to grow along.

The garden includes nut trees (almond and hazelnut), nine apple and six pear varieties, two types of fig, a kiwifruit, currants, a grape vine, an olive tree, plus a range of unusual berries including worcesterberry, boysenberry, Chilean cranberry/guava, goji berry and gooseberries.

The garden has been designed so that there is fruit ripening all year round, although the team working in the garden also dried some in a homemade solar dryer to extend the harvest through winter.

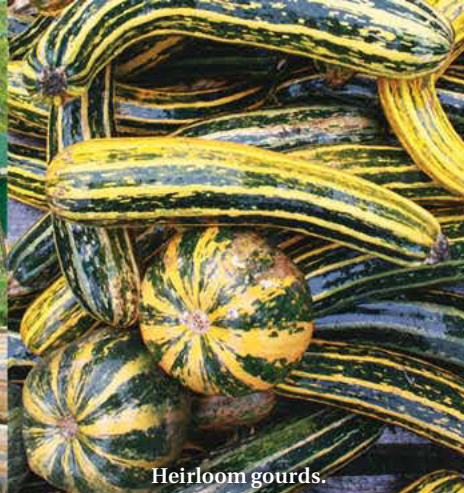
DO IT YOURSELF

If you have more than 200m² some other useful ideas for your own self-sufficient garden include:

- 1 Install a beehive – Koanga uses the top bar hive system to increase pollination and ramp up yield.
- 2 Use trees or shrubs and plants for nitrogen fixing. In an urban setting, Koanga would recommend options like tagasaste (*Cytisus proliferus*), perennial runner beans, perennial sweet peas, tree lupins and alfalfa.
- 3 Have wicking beds on concrete areas – these have a water reservoir in the bottom so that plants can suck water up to the surface as required.
- 4 Get a small biochar maker for turning the sticks of wood left over after the rabbits have eaten the leaves and bark into biochar to help remineralise the soil.
- 5 Build a home-made solar dryer for preserving herbs and fruit.



Checking the beehives.



Heirloom gourds.

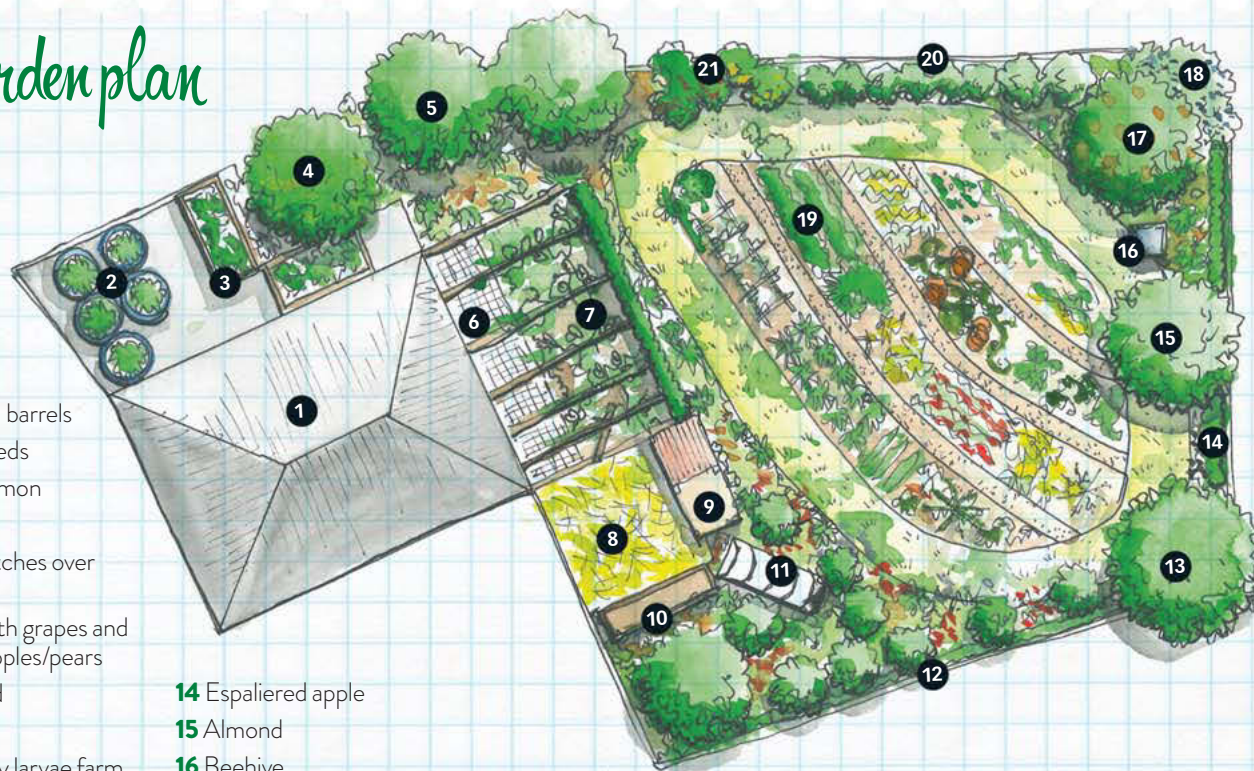


Beans saved for sowing next season.



Storing the harvest.

Garden plan



- 1 House
- 2 Plant filled barrels
- 3 Wicking beds
- 4 'Meyer' lemon
- 5 Hazelnuts
- 6 Rabbit hutches over worm farm
- 7 Pergola with grapes and cordoned apples/pears
- 8 Straw yard
- 9 Chickens
- 10 Soldier fly larvae farm
- 11 Passive solar cloche
- 12 Espaliered figs
- 13 Cooking apple
- 14 Espaliered apple
- 15 Almond
- 16 Beehive
- 17 Clementine mandarin
- 18 Boysenberry corner
- 19 Main garden beds

- 20 Chilean cranberry, gooseberries and currants
- 21 Raspberries

Plan drawn by Renée Davies at Unitec's Landscape Architecture Department

THE RESULTS

Real-time fruit & vege
production from Koanga's
experimental garden

The garden was set up and planted out over six months in 2013 and the first harvests began in early summer. Even during winter, there are still significant amounts of food coming out of the garden, which will only increase as it matures in the next five years.

MONTH	WHAT WE PICKED	TOTAL	VALUE
NOVEMBER 2013	Eggs	50	\$25
	'Odell's' lettuce	22	\$33
	Welsh bunching onions	10 bunches	\$19.50
	Zucchini	2kg	\$14
			\$91.50
DECEMBER 2013	Eggs	130	\$65
	Zucchini	18kg	\$58
	'Odell's' lettuce	64	\$96
	Welsh bunching onions	30 bunches	\$58
	Daikon 'Tokinashi'	50kg	\$250
	'Kaiapoi' bush beans	5.7kg	\$51
	Magenta spreen (a leafy green)	6 bunches	\$18
	Chives	10 bunches	\$19.50
	Lemons	10kg	\$50
			\$665.50
JANUARY 2014	Eggs	131	\$65
	Corn	50 cobs	\$50
	Basil	2 bunches	\$6
	Magenta spreen	9 bunches	\$54
	Cucumber	2	\$3
	Zucchini	20kg	\$100
	Lettuce	50	\$75
	Welsh bunching onions	20 bunches	\$30
	Green beans	2kg	\$14
	Beetroot	5.5kg	\$40
	Runner beans	2.4kg	\$22
	Beet greens	300	\$5
			\$464
FEBRUARY 2014	Eggs	50	\$25
	Salad greens	28 bunches	\$140
	Carrots	6kg	\$13.80
	Daikon	5kg	\$17.50
	Mandarins	15kg	\$75
	Lemons	6kg	\$30
	Chickens	2	\$60
			\$361.30
AUGUST 2014	Eggs	140	\$70
	Zucchini	8kg	\$24
	Pumpkins	10kg	\$50
	Green beans	3kg	\$27
	Lettuce	60	\$90
	Magenta spreen	30	\$150
	Corn	200	\$200
	Welsh bunching onions	20 bunches	\$60
	Cucumbers	30	\$45
			\$716



"Koanga believes that over time the research that comes out of this garden project will be valuable for everybody in an urban situation who cares about food security and health," says Kay Baxter. "We are keen to find a sponsor to support this project – if you are interested or have any ideas, please get in touch with us."

If you are interested in knowing more about this garden and how it was created – or in replicating some or all of its principles in your own backyard – the ebook *The Koanga Institute 200m² Urban Garden*, written by Kay and Joanna Cathie, with contributions from some of the other Koanga interns, is available on Koanga's website, koanga.org.nz. Good luck! 🍀

SOIL TIPS

To grow a lot of nutrient-dense food in a small garden, you will need external inputs. So here are five great and cost-effective ways the Koanga Institute suggests to improve your soil:

- 1 Recycle bones through a biochar maker. Add the ash to compost.
- 2 Recycle any excess brown cardboard and white paper through your compost or worm farm.
- 3 Collect leaves and hedge prunings from neighbours and parks as either feed for rabbits – although check on toxicity – or for adding to compost.
- 4 Add seaweed and saltwater fish waste, such as bones, heads and leftovers, to compost.
- 5 Cultivate multiple layers of tree, shrubs, legumes and ground covers, including plants to help maintain soil fertility.

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COMMUNITY GARDEN

Vegetables are interspersed with bee-friendly flowers, which are left to go to seed, in keeping with the permaculture ethos.



Make yourself at home...

Christine Rush reports on a Great Barrier Island garden that's enlisting bach owners to help provide a productive patch for locals and holidaymakers alike

Think of Great Barrier Island and you might picture a remote wilderness with lush native forest, unspoilt beaches and bounteous plantlife. Think again. According to Sue Daly, of the Oruawharo Community Garden at Medlands Beach, the island has very little fertile land after years of deforestation, mining and farming. On top of this, the soil there is sandy, baking hot in summer and very exposed. "It's going to take years to build up organic matter. Plus, there's no reticulated anything: no sewage or water."

About four years ago, Sue was part of a group of residents who took a NorthTec course in horticulture, run on the island by tutor Caity Endt. Each course involved making a huge compost heap, all of which had to be double-dug into the beds. NorthTec supplied irrigation, a toolshed, tools, and seeds and potting mix. "It was life-changing," Sue says. "It not only gave us the opportunity to learn new skills, it became the social highlight of our week."

The students were from all backgrounds – the oldest being in her 80s – and several had left school with no qualifications. "It was so well-taught, and just on the cusp of everyone starting to think about sustainability and growing your own."

The gardens at Medlands Beach were created from scratch by the students, and now provide a venue for composting workshops run by Auckland council. Some participants have drifted away, but a core remains, plus others who supply plants, or drop off seaweed, hay or horse manure.

But word has spread among the island's bach-owners, and Sue says they are helping out in their own way. They can't tend their own sandy gardens, so at Oruawharo they grow barbecued-fish-friendly herbs, kale and perpetual spinach for holiday-makers to enjoy. There's a container for koha, which amasses a "delightful amount" of money. "They seem very appreciative when we run into them," says Sue. "There's even local caterers looking for rocket, leeks and parsley, all of which self-seed." Holiday makers also supply scraps for composting.

Still, it's hard to be productive with a handful of people. There's always a need for volunteers for watering, and they are planning a working bee in early autumn. "We do need more people but we don't want them to feel guilty – either they want to do it or not. They can help in the garden and take veges, drop off supplies and take veges, or give a koha – it's up to them."



Common copper butterfly.



The koha collection point.

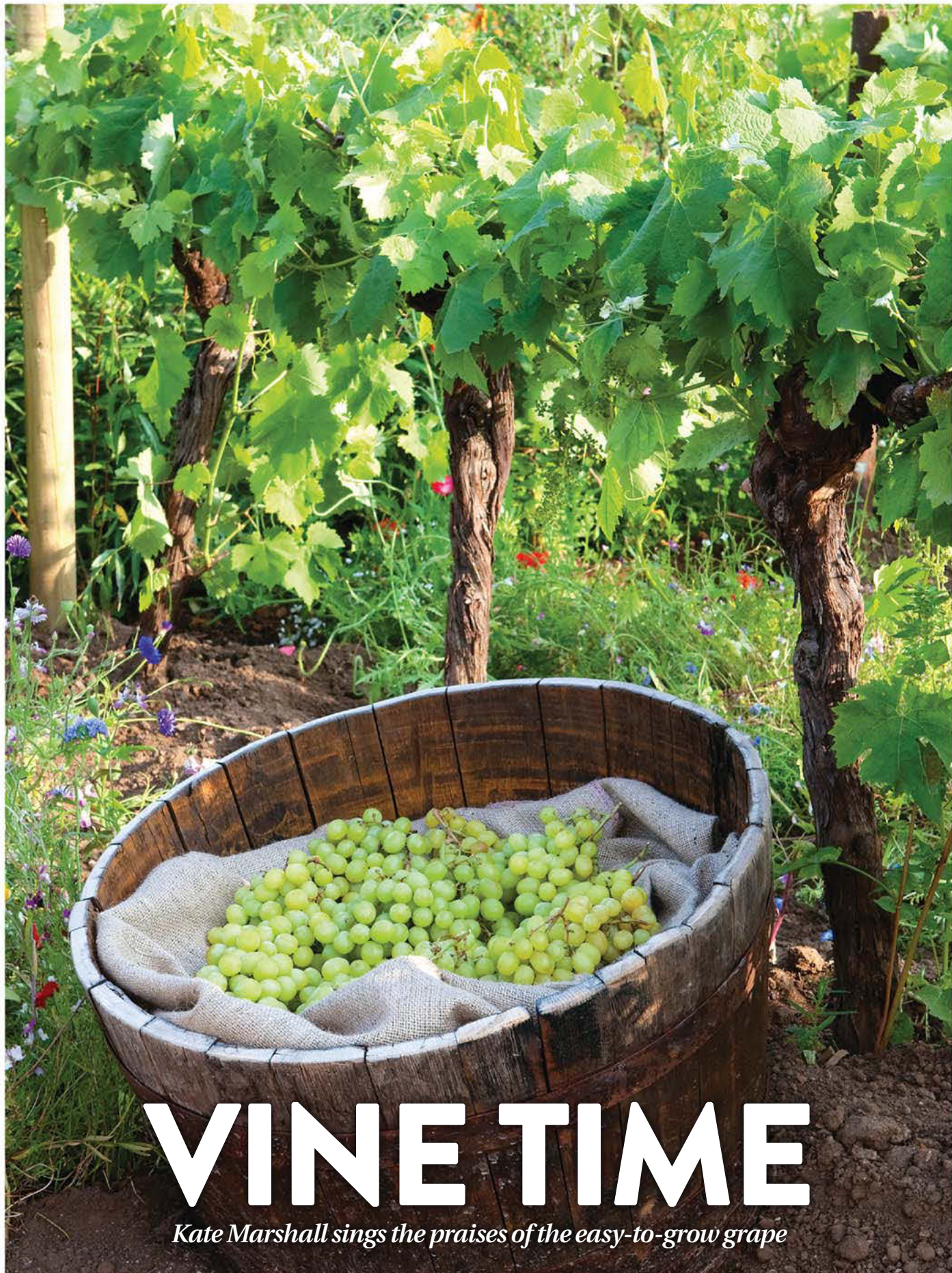


Salvias dot the border.

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VINE TIME

Kate Marshall sings the praises of the easy-to-grow grape

Grapes are so easy they can even be grown in a container – a wine barrel would be in keeping with the theme – and the vine trained onto a rose pillar

Grapes are one of the simplest fruit plants to grow, and alongside citrus and plum trees, should be found in every Kiwi backyard. The vines usually need very little care apart from winter pruning and watering during dry summer spells. They take up little space, so can be grown in even the smallest plots. Grapes are long-lived plants too, producing big crops for up to 100 years!

Growing guide

Grape plants are best planted in sites with full sun and protection from strong winds. The vines tolerate salty air, so can be planted in coastal spots. The roots prefer a free-draining soil, so add bark, small stones and sand to heavy soil to improve drainage. Place light-coloured gravel around the base of the vines to radiate heat and light into the canopy, which will increase the sweetness of the grapes. Clear the soil of weeds before planting, and keep the area around the base of the plant weed-free. Grapes can even be grown in a container – a wine barrel would be in keeping with the theme – and the vine trained onto a rose pillar.

In the deep south, grapes are best grown in a tunnel house to protect the small, tender flowers from late frosts and to provide warmth to ripen and sweeten the fruit. Grapes can be planted with the roots and trunk outside, trained so the canopy and crop grow inside a tunnel house or a conservatory. One benefit of this approach is that the vine is watered naturally with rain, rather than needing irrigation as it would if planted inside. Plus there's an example of this is at Hampton Court Palace, so you'd be mixing with royalty using this growing method!

How to grow your own vines

Grape plants may be grafted onto a phylloxera-resistant rootstock, or grown from cuttings. Using grafted plants is highly recommended in the North Island and in Marlborough where the phylloxera insects are more prevalent. This is to ensure a healthy and productive plant, and to be responsible to nearby grape growers.

Cutting-grown plants are more common and usually cheaper to buy, as an easier and shorter propagation method than grafting. You can have a go at growing your own grape plants for free by using winter prunings.



Make cuttings about 10-15cm long and pencil thickness with at least three plump buds. Dip in rooting hormone (or willow water) and plant in a tray of pumice mix about 10cm deep. Check after a month to see if small roots have started to develop then, once growing, transplant into a pot to grow on until late spring before planting out in your garden.

All grape varieties are self-pollinating – the flowers are hermaphroditic – so it's not necessary to plant more than one variety for pollination purposes. (Though of course it might keep all family members happy if one red and one green variety are planted!) Grape vines flower in late spring, so are susceptible to frosts at this time; cover the tender blooms with

frost cloth if there is a chance of Jack Frost making a call.

Grape plants grow as vines, so they should be planted along a wall or a trellis, or over a pergola or arch. Grapes are attractive vines with their large, lobed leaves, which provide dappled shade in summer before turning to rich colours in autumn.

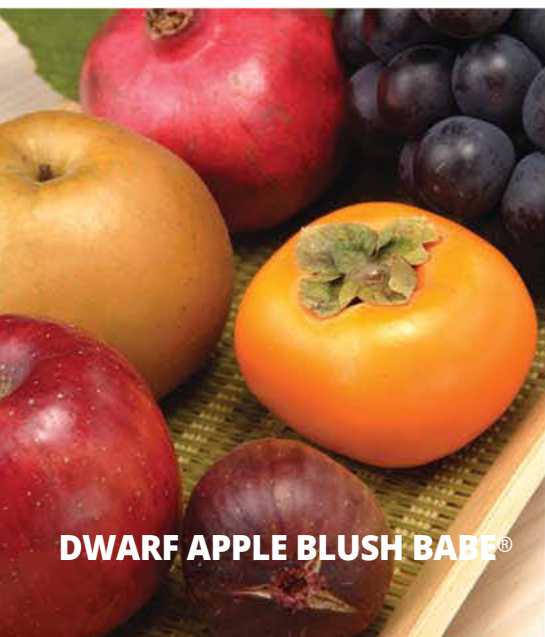
Pests & diseases

Pick fruit as soon as it matures; the sweet scent of overripe fruit attracts wasps. Covering the vines with fine netting may be necessary, and helps to keep birds from getting to your grapes before you do. Alternatively, bunches of grapes can be wrapped in a muslin or paper bag.

Phylloxera is a very small insect that feeds on the roots. It is devastating, so most vineyards are now planted out with specially bred rootstocks resistant to the bug. There is no practical solution apart from these resistant rootstocks, but suggested methods include planting a toad under every plant and watering with white wine! Phylloxera is unlikely to be a problem in home gardens, however, and at this stage it is only found in the North Island and in Marlborough.

In warm, humid climates, fungal diseases like powdery and downy mildew can be problematic for grapes. It's a good idea to prune to an open canopy to allow air movement, that reduces the chance of diseases building up. A fungicide spray may also be needed, from bud burst through to early summer.

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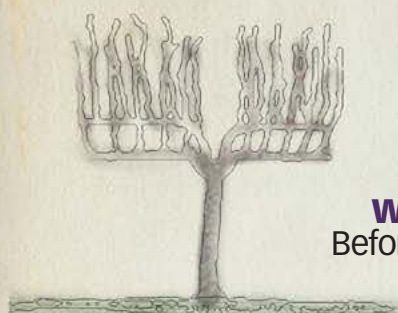
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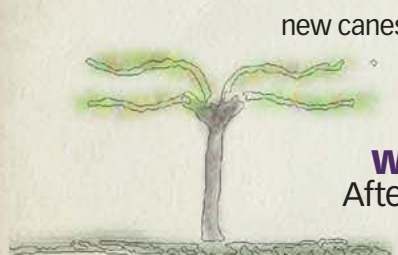
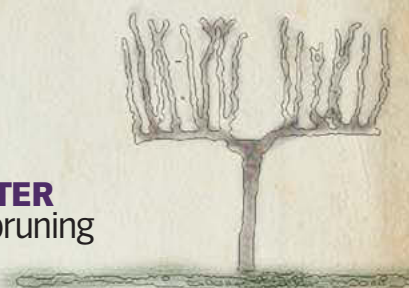
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CANE PRUNING

SPUR PRUNING



WINTER
Before pruning



new canes

WINTER
After pruning



old wood



new canes

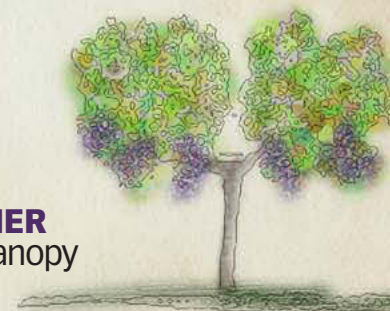
SPRING
Bud burst



old wood



SUMMER
Mature canopy



Pruning

Winter pruning is important; it promotes new growth that will produce bunches of fruit the following summer. There are two methods: the more common cane

pruning, or spur pruning, which is used for cordons, arches and pergolas where a permanent vine structure is required. Spur pruning retains a permanent structure of long canes,

by pruning the growth off these canes back to a spur (a short stub around 10cm long with two or three buds). Cane pruning is more severe, removing all but two or four canes that grew in the previous season, training these along wires or trellis.

You can bend and sculpt winter prunings to create a garden art sphere or a bean tepee for your veg patch. Or use pencil-thickness trimmings to produce new plants.

Trim back leaves from around the bunches of grapes in mid-late summer as the fruit starts to ripen. This exposes the bunches to direct sunlight to increase the sugar levels, and makes picking easier.

Harvesting & preserving

Depending on the variety, grapes ripen between February and May. The best way to tell when grapes are ready is by tasting them: the fruit should feel soft and taste sweet. Using secateurs, cut ripe bunches with the stalk intact. Grapes can be stored for up to two weeks in the fridge, but are best eaten soon after harvesting. Pick grapes on a fine day, because bunches picked in the rain will deteriorate quickly. Wash the grapes just before eating.

Freshly harvested, home-grown grapes are so far superior to imported supermarket bunches, they might as well be different fruit. Excess fruit can be made into juice by cooking the fruit then straining with a muslin cloth to remove skins and pips. Grape jams and jellies are delicious on scones and pikelets, and make a nice change from berry-based preserves.

Young leaves can be used to make the Middle Eastern finger food dolma, or dolmades. Use mid-sized leaves with no holes that have not been sprayed, early in the season. (Small leaves are too thin and large older leaves are too thick and tough.) Blanch whole leaves in a strongly salted boiling brine for just a few moments, before plunging into ice-cold water to keep the green colour and stop the cooking process. Drain and pat dry before using to wrap a mixture of cooked rice, herbs and currants. ❀

GRAPE VARIETIES



THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF CULTIVARS TO CHOOSE FROM, BUT HERE ARE A FEW TOP-PERFORMERS TO CONSIDER

RED/ BLACK	FRUIT COLOUR	DESCRIPTION	HARVEST TIME
'ALBANY SURPRISE'	Black	Sweet and spicy flavour, aromatic; good disease resistance; tolerant of humidity; medium to large fruit	Mid-March to early April
'BLACK HAMBURG'	Blue-black	Sweet, intense muscatel flavour	March-April
'BUFFALO'	Red-black	Disease-resistant; tender, juicy, green flesh with labrusca flavour	April-May
'CANADICE'	Red	Excellent delicate flavour; seedless; good disease resistance; thin, dark-red skin	Mid-March to early April
'CARDINAL'	Dark red	Very sweet; used to make raisins	February-March
'IONA'	Pink	Sweet; hardy	March-April
'SCHUYLER'	Black	Sweet with slight currant flavour; good disease resistance	Late February to mid-March
'STEUBEN'	Red-black	Sweet, spicy flavour; easy to grow; disease-resistant	March-April
GREEN/ GOLD	FRUIT COLOUR	DESCRIPTION	HARVEST TIME
'AUTUMN MUSCAT'	Green-gold	Very sweet and spicy muscatel flavour with a distinctive perfume; used to make Italian sparkling wine and dessert wines	March-April
'HIMROD'	Green	Honey-like flavour; seedless	February
'ITALIA'	Golden yellow	Delicate and musky; vigorous plant	Mid-March to early April
'LAKEMONT'	Green	Sweet with crisp, juicy flesh; seedless; vigorous plant	March to early-April
'NIAGARA'	Green	Delicious, mildly sweet; very hardy	Late February to mid-March
'THOMPSON SEEDLESS'	Green-gold	Large bunches of small, sweet grapes	April-May



In the mix

Jane Wrigglesworth explains how to make your own classic herb blends to add a touch of flair to your meals



Bundle a stick of celery or baby leek in with the traditional bouquet garni herbs to impart extra flavour

Certain herbs have an affinity with certain foods. Dill goes well with fish – we all know that – and rosemary with lamb. But certain herb combinations trump anything that a single herb on its own might offer. In the right quantities they enhance rather than overwhelm a dish, releasing a delicious, rounded flavour to your meals.

There are classic herbal combinations: bouquet garni is probably the most well known and can be added to many dishes. Another well-known mix is herbes de Provence, a combination of herbs that typically grow in the southern part of France. Fines herbes is another, or you have barbecue rubs and Italian seasonings. However you want to use them, it's easy to make your own using home-grown herbs.

Bouquet garni

This consists of whole sprigs of fresh herbs tied in a bundle. It can be added to soups, stocks, sauces and casseroles. Traditionally it contains bay leaf, parsley and thyme, though there are many variations on the recipe. A sprig of savory could be added, for example, or the warm flavouring of marjoram. The herbs can also be bundled together with a stick of celery or a baby leek to impart extra flavour. If your herbs tend to come apart while cooking, you can place them in a small muslin bag. This way, peppercorns can also be added to the mix.

Bouquet garni is typically added at the beginning of cooking to enable the flavour to be released during slow cooking.

Ingredients • 1 bay leaf • 1 bunch parsley stalks • 2 sprigs thyme

Tie the selected herbs together with unwaxed kitchen string and add to your pot while cooking.

Herbes de Provence

This is a mixture of dried herbs typical of the region of Provence in France. It's often sold in terracotta jars, topped with a pretty cloth. The basic recipe includes thyme, rosemary, lavender flowers, marjoram and savory, but modern recipes add many more herbs and even orange zest for a more robust flavour.

Sprinkle the herbs into omelettes and stews or over meat, fish and poultry before cooking. Or mix with vinegar, oil and a little Dijon mustard to make a salad dressing.

The following recipe uses many herbs, but you could make a simpler version with just thyme, rosemary, sweet marjoram, summer savory and oregano.

Ingredients • 2 teaspoons dried thyme • 1 teaspoon dried rosemary • 1 teaspoon dried lavender flowers • 2 teaspoons dried sweet marjoram • 1 teaspoon summer savory • 1 teaspoon dried oregano • 1 teaspoon dried mint • 2 teaspoons dried basil • 1 teaspoon dried sage • 1 teaspoon fennel seeds

Place herbs in a food processor or blender and whizz until finely chopped. Store in an airtight container.

Fines herbes

The most important herb mix

in French cuisine is fines herbes. This is a lovely blend of fresh parsley, chervil, chives and French tarragon, though in modern day kitchens thyme is sometimes added. You can change the quantities of the four herbs though to suit your palate; for a more delicate flavour, add less chives and tarragon. If you want the flavours turned up loud, add more. Be careful when adding extra herbs, however, as the traditional flavouring you expect from fines herbes will change too.

DID YOU KNOW...?

Parsley comes from the Mediterranean and has been cultivated since the 3rd century BC. Greek has a phrase "just like parsley", which means a person who appears everywhere and fits in easily

With its mild anise flavouring and subtle taste of parsley, chervil is often considered the gourmet's parsley. I have heard it described as a subtle blend of caraway, anise and tarragon with a hint of pear... though the average punter may find it hard to discern these flavours!

In the garden, chervil (*Anthriscus cerefolium*) prefers some shade. In warm spots or direct sun, it goes to seed quickly. In summer, the plant can reach maturity in six to eight weeks, so successive sowing is necessary for a continuous supply.

French tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculus*) also has an anise flavour, though it's much stronger. Its close cousin, Russian tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculus* subsp. *dracunculoides*), is more hardy and vigorous, but inferior in flavour. Use French tarragon in your mix for a classic combination.

French tarragon is a herbaceous perennial that dies back in winter. In cold areas, mulch the roots in winter to keep them insulated, or move pots to a sheltered, frost-free position.

Ingredients • 4 tablespoons fresh parsley • 2 tablespoons fresh chives
• 2 tablespoons fresh chervil
• 1 tablespoon fresh tarragon

Chop herbs finely before use.

When cooking, add to the pot at the last minute. It can be sprinkled on top of dishes without cooking, and it is especially good added to omelettes.

Fines herbes partners well with egg dishes, cream-based recipes, potatoes, rice and seafood.

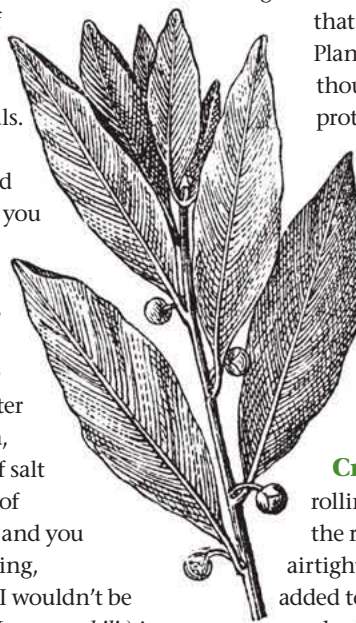
English herb blend

There is an English version of fines herbes, which includes parsley, chives, thyme and tarragon, though this blend typically uses dried herbs. To make, combine 5-6 tablespoons each of the above herbs and store in an airtight container. Use with lamb and pork, or add to stuffing.

Italian herb blend

If you like your Italian dishes, you can prepare a herb mix using dried bay leaf, parsley, thyme and celery leaves. Celery leaves are often overlooked, but they add fantastic flavour to many dishes. Combined with carrots and onion, celery is almost always the first combination of ingredients that hits the pan when cooking Italian meals. Beyond this blend, seasonings are added depending on what you are cooking.

Bay leaf is one of the most used herbs in Italian cuisine. Simply add a couple of leaves to your water when cooking pasta, along with plenty of salt – or add a teaspoon of Italian herb blend – and you have a different tasting, fragrant pasta dish. I wouldn't be without a bay tree (*Laurus nobilis*) in



my garden – for Italian or any other cuisine. The leaves, fresh or dried, can be used in many dishes. If you pay money for dried leaves, you might as well grow your own tree, and dry the leaves yourself.

Bay trees are easy to grow, and while they can reach 15m in height, in a home garden situation they're unlikely to get to that if snipped on a regularly basis. Plants are frost-hardy to -5°C, though young plants need protection from frost.

Ingredients

• 10 dried bay leaves
• 1 tablespoon dried sage
• 1 tablespoon dried thyme
• 1 tablespoon dried oregano • 1 tablespoon paprika • 1 tablespoon freshly ground black pepper

Crush the bay leaves with rolling pin until fine. Combine with the rest of the herbs and store in an airtight container. This mix can be added to the pot when cooking or used as a herb rub on meats. 🌿

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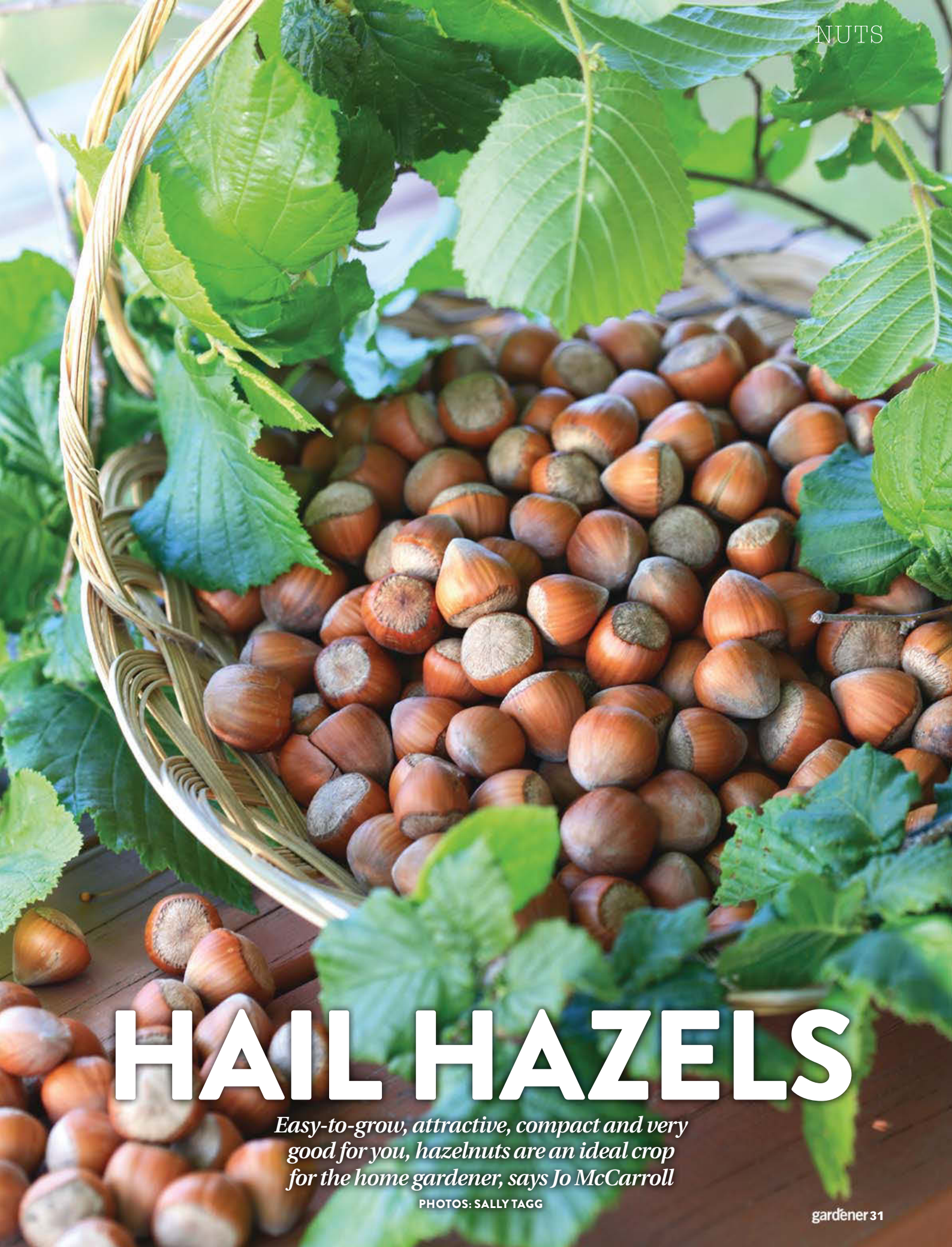


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HAIL HAZELS

Easy-to-grow, attractive, compact and very good for you, hazelnuts are an ideal crop for the home gardener, says Jo McCarroll

PHOTOS: SALLY TAGG



Hazelnuts are packed with protein and heart-friendly oils and make a lovely hedge. What gardener wouldn't go nuts for them!

There is just one piece of advice commercial hazelnut grower Dave Null would give a home gardener who was keen to try hazelnut trees. "That would be to take it easy, sit back and watch it grow," says Dave, who, along with wife Bev, grows hazelnuts from an 8ha property in the Waihopai Valley, 25 minutes west of Blenheim, and sells them online and at Marlborough Farmers Market under The Nutt Ranch label.

Dave and Bev were looking for something productive to grow as a retirement project about 15 years ago. The properties all around were planted in Marlborough's most famous crop – grapes – but Dave and Bev wanted something easier to manage. "Hazelnuts seemed like something we could handle. There's no technical pruning required, you just remove the suckers from the base, and they don't need to be sprayed. Plus the climate here suits them – they like a cold winter."

In fact, European hazelnuts (*Corylus avellana*) need a cold winter for good nut set, and are hardy to -14°C – although the long male catkins are frost-tender when they emerge, and can be damaged by an out-of-season frost. This aside, they tolerate most soil types, provided they get enough water. This is their main challenge, Dave says, since his trees are not irrigated, and a lack of water reduces the size of the crop.

"Around Christchurch some of the orchards that have irrigation set up can harvest around 3kg of nuts off one tree, whereas we only get 1.5-2.5kg a tree without any irrigation."

If left to their own devices, hazels grow like a thicket, sending up lots of suckers from the base of the plant. You can let them grow like that if you



want a hedge or a screen, otherwise remove the suckers at the base – they make great garden stakes – and shape them into a small tree with a trunk.

Hazelnuts are not self-fertile so you need at least two trees if you want to get a crop, and there are specific compatible pollinators for each variety. They are wind-pollinated too so the trees need to be planted close enough together that the pollen can transfer (no more than 20m apart).

Overseas, hazelnuts are affected by various diseases, in particular Eastern Filbert Blight, caused by the fungus *Anisogramma anomola*, which has not reached New Zealand. Hazel bacterial blight (*Xanthomonas arboricola* *pv.* *corylina*) is found here, but mainly affects only young or stressed plants. Dave says his trees are sometimes affected by hazelnut big bud mite, "but we don't spray and it goes away by itself". Other insect pests that can target the crop are green shield beetles, which feed on the nut close to harvest and turn the kernel bitter, and lemon tree borer.

Murray Redpath is the chairman of the Hazelnut Growers Association of NZ, which represents more than 100 orchardists growing hazels. Murray planted his first hazelnuts on Wairata Forest Farm, his 575ha property in the eastern Bay of Plenty, back in 1982 and now has the largest collection of hazel cultivars in New Zealand – possibly even in the Southern Hemisphere. He believes hazelnuts have significant potential as a commercial crop in New Zealand, and is actively involved in trialling new varieties and breeding new cultivars.

The main aim of his breeding programme is to develop varieties with resistance to bacterial blight, "a problem in New Zealand with our very changeable climate", pollinators for late-flowering varieties and commercial varieties with low chill requirements. About 10 years ago, as part of a project funded by the MAF Sustainable Farming Fund, he started collecting scion wood from old hazelnut trees and propagating it to assess its worth.

There have been promising results, he says, both from the old cultivars and his breeding programme with several high-yielding, disease-resistant selections, and also selections that might be potential pollinators for Kiwi-bred 'Whiteheart', far and away the most commonly grown hazelnut here. 'Alexandra' and 'Merveille de Bollwiller' are usually recommended as pollinators for 'Whiteheart', but sometimes, especially in warmer areas from Nelson northwards, they tend to shed their pollen before 'Whiteheart' flowers. The research is ongoing, Murray says, "but there are certainly some interesting selections that will be very suitable for home gardeners," he says. ❀



Marlborough hazelnut growers Dave and Bev Null



LUCKY DUKKAH

NUTT RANCH'S HAZELNUT DUKKAH

Dave claims this recipe has previously been kept top secret, "something like Colonel Sander's 11 herbs and spices!" But after some gentle arm-twisting, he agreed to reveal it here.

Ingredients • 200g sesame seeds • 200g hazelnuts • 4 tablespoons coriander seed • 4 tablespoons cumin seed • 2 teaspoons salt • 2 teaspoons pepper • a pinch of dried thyme

Toast the hazelnuts on a shallow baking tray at 180°C until the skins start to flake and smell toasty (about 20-30 minutes). Wrap the nuts in paper towels and rub them vigorously to get as much skin off as you can, then chop them in a food processor until they are the consistency of coarse breadcrumbs.

In a frying pan, carefully toast the sesame seeds until they turn brown and add them to the hazelnut crumb. Separately toast the coriander seeds and then the cumin seeds, crush them together in a mortar and pestle or spice grinder and add that to the nut mix. Mix in all together with the salt, pepper and thyme. Allow the dukkah to cool and store in a glass jar with screw-tight lid in a cool, dark place.

This is great served with fresh bread and extra virgin olive oil; or sprinkle it on salads and buttery baked potatoes, use it to coat salmon fillets, pork chops or chicken; or even add it to stuffing to give it a spicy Middle Eastern twist.

Variety guide

'Whiteheart': Murray says the naturally semi-dwarf 'Whiteheart' performs well under ideal conditions, producing a large crop of very high quality kernels. It does flower late, however, so it can miss the pollen from the usually recommended pollinators 'Alexandra' and 'Merveille de Bollwiller', particularly in warmer regions. For those regions, Murray recommends planting a later pollinator too – commercial orchards use 'Keen's Late' and 'Theta'.

'Alexandra': While it is usually planted as a pollinator for 'Whiteheart', this variety also produces a good few medium-sized nuts.

'Merveille de Bollwiller': Also mainly planted as a pollinator for 'Whiteheart', with a later pollen shed than 'Alexandra'. It itself is pollinated by 'Alexandra'.

'Auckland #2': Catkins are borne over a long period, which makes this a useful non-nut-bearing early pollinator.

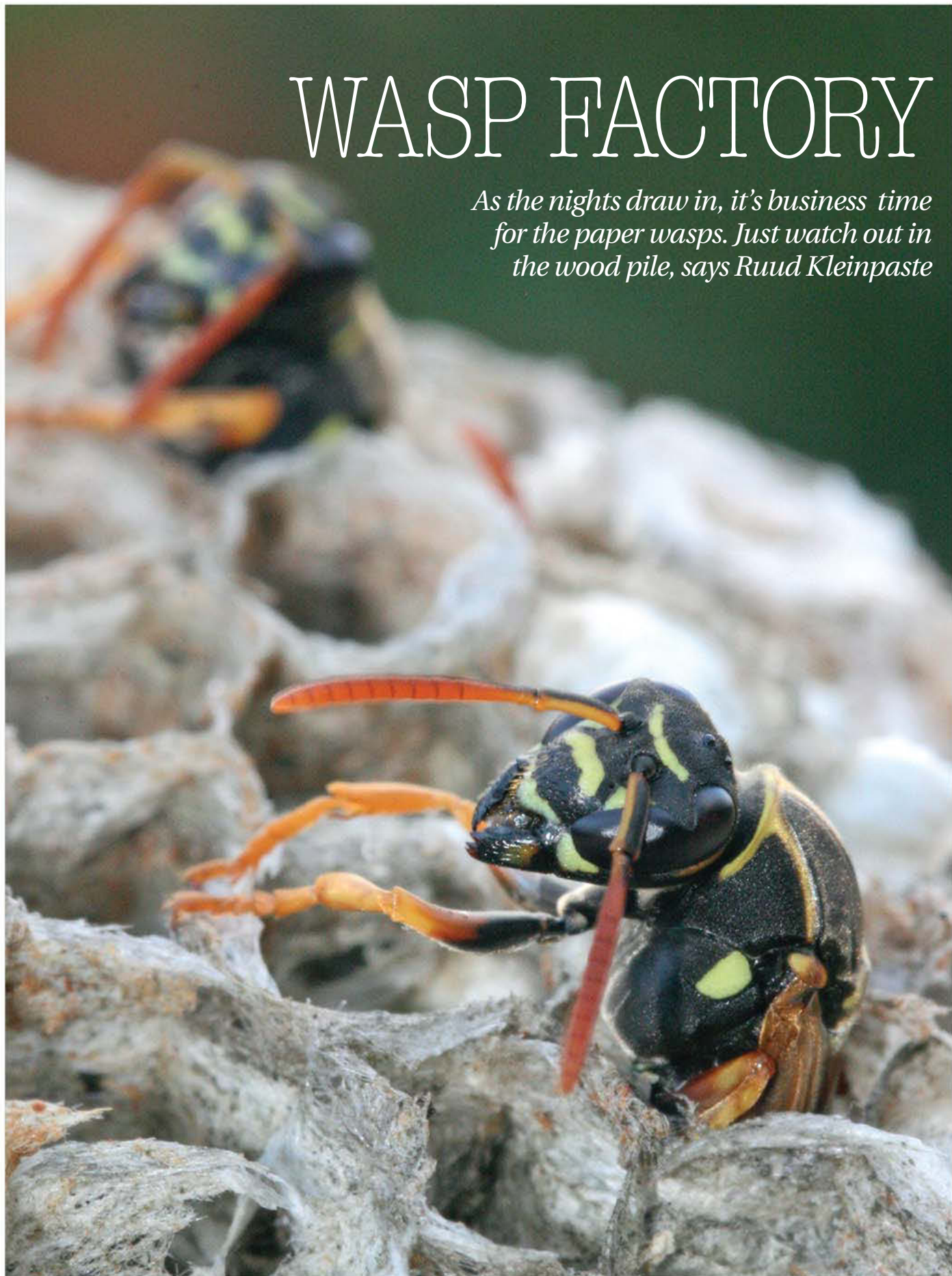
'Barcelona': Murray believes, after 'Whiteheart', that this variety and 'Tonda Romana' have the best potential as commercial crops here. 'Barcelona' produces a good yield of large nuts. Its pollinators include 'Merveille de Bollwiller', 'Butler' and 'Tonda di Giffoni'.

'Tonda di Giffoni': An early, high-yielding variety producing medium-sized nuts – although Murray says the kernels have a tendency to mould here. It's pollinators: 'Barcelona' and 'Tonda Romano'.

'Tonda Romano': Medium nuts with great flavour. Pollinators include 'Merveille de Bollwiller', 'Barcelona' and 'Tonda di Giffoni'.

WASP FACTORY

As the nights draw in, it's business time for the paper wasps. Just watch out in the wood pile, says Ruud Kleinpaste



There's a certain franticness in the air around autumn. Gardeners are trying to squeeze the last bit of colour out of their little paradise

deciduous trees, meanwhile, are not only helping with a slow pigment strip-tease of the leaves, they're also playfully indicating that winter is on the horizon. Aphids drop their male babies to mate with the last females, so these can lay their eggs in nooks and crannies for a successful hibernation. The crickets have crickets and the ants have stored their food, while native birds eagerly lap up the last of this season's honeydew in our magnificent beech forests. Cicada eggs have hatched and the tiny nymphs have dropped to the ground to disappear in one of the old cracks in the soil, a result of our dry, long summer. The firewood is stacked and the wine cellar stocked. I suppose we're about ready for the snow and frost in the south, or the endless miserable rain in the north.

Paper wasps have also noticed the shortening of the days. The nest is just about empty and the larvae have turned to adult females and males. For now, the butterfly caterpillars are safe as there is no longer any more demand for protein.

This time of the year is business time for these wasps. There's planning work to be done and the very first objective is to deliver as many fertile queen wasps as possible for next years' activities. Males gather in groups, known as leks, on conspicuous platforms where they dance, fly and dash all day long in the autumn sun. Wooden fences, a large branch, a fallen log or the new firewood stack are all suitable lek sites, especially when bathed in sunshine. Males dance and prance, while females observe; that seems to be the *modus operandi* here. The mated females are the new fertile queens and these girls carry the future of the species on their tiny shoulders. Their objective is to be in the best condition as possible and – most of all – find a suitable, safe site to overwinter.

The typical spaces for *Polistes*, or wasps, are sheltered locations near the soil, in old tunnels, hollow logs, between the folds of an old raincoat in the porch, or (watch out!) in tightly stacked firewood. There's always an element of painful surprise when you pick up a log to put on the fire... These hibernating queens might be cold and dozy, but when they get handled they seem to wake up fast and show a distinct lack of humour.

The whole strategy in paper wasps is to make it to spring with a belly full of eggs. As soon as temperatures rise to levels required for sustained insect activity (usually above 12°C) the queens wake up and start to move about. They grab a bite to eat and look for a good place to start a nest – under soffits, verandas, park benches – it's usually a sheltered spot where the low angled sunrays can reach in early spring for some passive solar heating. They stick nests on vertical surfaces too, such as fences and branches.

Often – as luck would have it – near a place frequented by humans! What happens next is one of those little marvels of nature that is not only very clever but also inspirational. This heavily pregnant insect starts to gnaw and scrape off fibres of cellulose from wooden objects: branches, bark, rotting wood, as well as balustrades, timber decks and furniture. These fibres are then masticated and mixed with saliva to form the most elegant, lightweight and waterproof building material for a brand new nest. The concept of making papier-mâché was quite obviously invented in the insect world.

Initially a small, slightly spherical nest is constructed, with half a dozen or so hexagonal brood cells; each of these cells will house an egg and the subsequent stages of a wasp larva. The queen then gathers protein (caterpillars and other invertebrate specimens) to feed her small brood. The first hatchlings will all be female wasps and these daughters then take over the building duties. The queen continues to lay eggs and adult members of the growing colony take care of the subsequent larvae and pupae. Especially in summer, the demand for insect protein is quite large. The female workers hunt for their prey, with caterpillars being the pick of the bunch. They don't care what type of caterpillar it is: a cabbage white is quickly found, cut up, and carted away in sections to the nest. Gardeners would be happy with that kind of action.

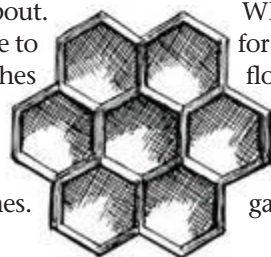
Unfortunately, caterpillars with striped pyjamas, such as monarch butterfly larvae, are even easier to spot and the cardiac glycosides inside this prey do not deter the wasps in the slightest. That nasty poison only affects vertebrates.

There's some evidence that paper wasps consume a large number of native insects in your garden, particularly if you are on the fringes of the native bush. Their biggest hunting asset is their built-in GPS system, which brings them back to the food source with great accuracy.

By autumn the nest is starting to prepare for winter with the arrival of males... and so the cycle continues.

So, if you see a whole bunch of males dancing and prancing, you'll now know why. You will also then know that there is no point in destroying the nests that are hanging from your gutters, soffits and timber decks, because those nests are no longer occupied by wasps and will slowly disintegrate into harmless, natural substances.

Which makes the whole process a great exemplar for a circular economy, with cycles of growth, flourishing activity, future planning, decline and rejuvenation and re-distribution of valuable resources, giving new life. There is no "last hurrah" – only a penultimate one. But then gardeners know this already! 🍀



DIY CHICKEN TRACTOR

Save your lawn and provide a regular change of scenery with this portable home for your poultry

MATERIALS

You need: 11 x 1.2m x 150mm x 19mm fence palings • 6 x 1.2m x 150mm x 25mm fence palings • 6 x 1.5m x 150mm x 25mm fence palings • 6 x 1.8m x 150mm x 25mm fence palings • 1 x 900mm x 30mm x 6mm slat (we used one from an old trellis) • 400mm x 75mm x 50mm offcut (for wheel block) • 10m roll of 19mm x 900mm galvanised netting wire • Plain galvanised angle (for roof capping) • 4 x 75mm butt hinges 3 x galvanised handles • 2 x wheels • Pack of 100 x 8g x 45mm galvanised screws • Pack of 35 x 8g x 25mm galvanised screws • 2 packs of 25 x 8g x 40mm galvanised screws • 16 x 8g x 35mm galvanised screws • 10 x 10g x 75mm galvanised screws • 2 x bugle batten galvanised screws (for wheels, ours were 14g x 75mm) • 4 x washers to fit screws • Power saw • Power drill • Plane • Wire cutter • Clamps • Sandpaper • Wood glue • 500ml Resene Lumbersider in 'Quarter Thorndon Cream' • 2 litres Resene Lumbersider in 'Powder Blue' • 500ml Resene General Purpose Metal Primer

Cutting measurements: Cut 3 x 1.8m fence palings in half lengthwise • Cut 2 x 1.8m fence palings into 3 pieces lengthwise (45m wide each) • Cut all 1.5m fence palings in half lengthwise • Cut all 1.2m x 25mm fence palings in half (so they measure 600mm)

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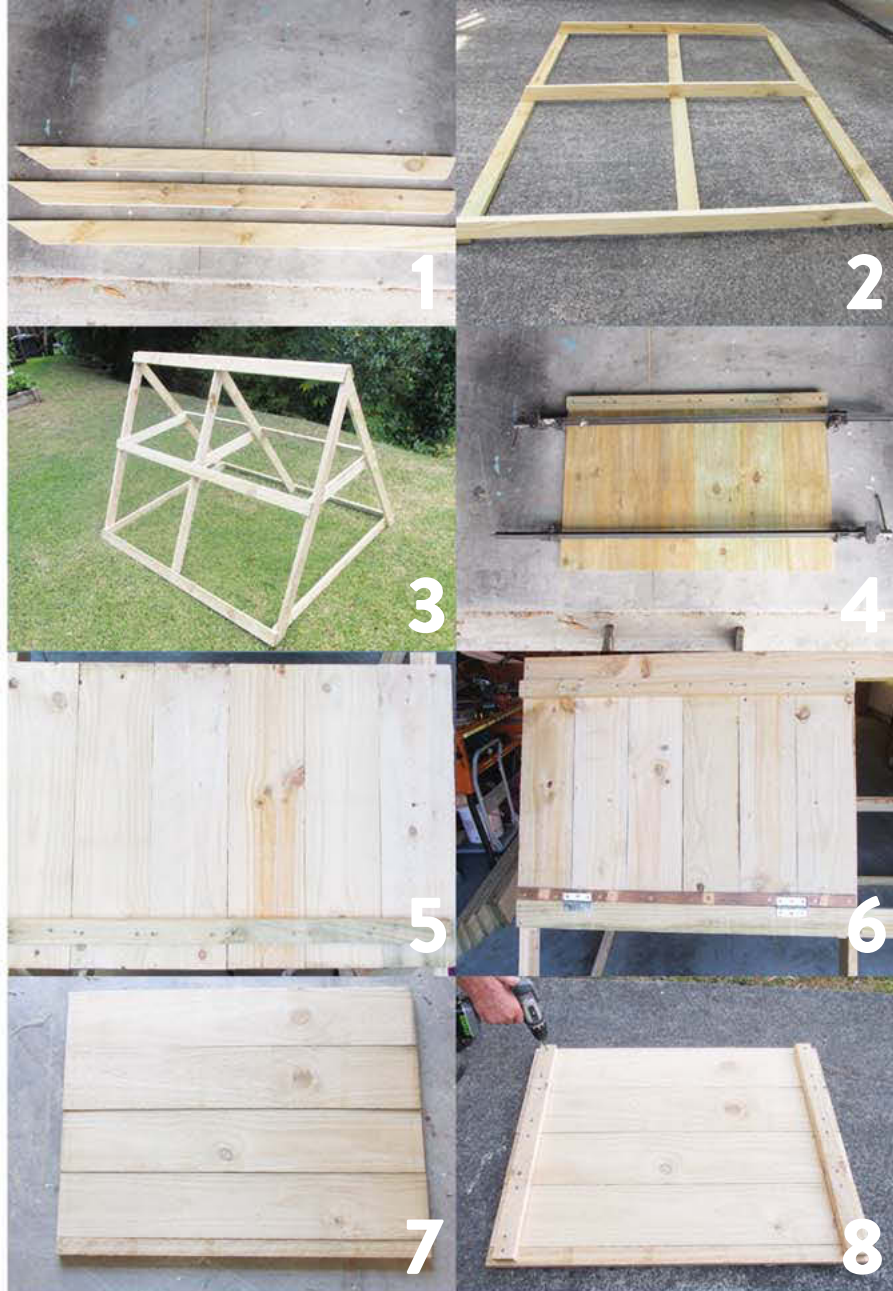
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1 Take six of the cut 1.5m lengths and cut a 60° angle at one end (top) and 30° angle on the other end (bottom).

2 Lay down three of the cut 1.8m lengths. Place three of the cut 1.5m angled lengths on top, as shown. Screw together using 45mm screws. Make a second frame.

3 From five of the cut 1.5m palings, cut 2 x 1.45m lengths and 3 x 740mm lengths. Cut a 30° angle on each end. Place the side frames together and attach supports with 45mm screws.

4 Make door panel. Cut 3 x 900mm and 1 x 840mm lengths from the already-cut 45mm-wide lengths. Clamp together six of the cut 1.2m boards. Screw 1 x 900mm length at top with 45mm screws.

5 Turn door panel over. Screw 840mm length at the bottom, 50mm up from the edge and 40mm in from the right edge. Screw in place using the 45mm screws.

6 On front side of door, fix two hinges at bottom using 25mm screws. Cut two indents in the 900mm trellis slat where the hinges go, then fix to bottom of door with 25mm screws. Fix door to frame.

7 Make floor. From the 1.2m x 19mm palings, cut 4 x 855mm lengths. Cut a 35mm wide strip from another 1.2m paling, then cut the strip to 855mm. Sand these.

8 From a 150mm x 25mm offcut, cut 2 x 630mm x 40mm lengths. Place on underside of floor panel 20mm in from short edges, and screw in with 40mm screws.

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9 Plane corners and long edges, then finish with sandpaper to ensure that it is smooth. Place floorboard into coop. Leave unscrewed so that the board can be removed if necessary.

10 From 1.2m x 19mm palings, cut three lengths of board to fit at the back of the coop above flooring. Mark overhanging angles with pencil, as shown, then cut to fit.

11 Cut the corners off the bottom board so the door closes. Screw boards in place. From an offcut, cut a triangle to fit the top. Cut another triangle for the opposite end of the coop and screw in place with 40mm screws.

12 Make another side panel. Place the remaining six cut 1.2m x 25mm boards side by side. Clamp. Using 45mm screws, fix 1 x 900mm length (as per step 4) at the top edge and one at the bottom. Set aside.

13 Make a frame for the bottom door. From the 45mm cut wood, cut 2 x 910mm and 2 x 655mm lengths. Cut a 45° angle on the ends and glue and screw together to form a frame.

14 Make ladder. Cut a 1.2m x 19mm paling to 900mm. For rungs, cut 8 x 150mm lengths. Fix with 35mm screws. From offcuts, cut 2 x 140mm lengths. Screw to frame.



15 Cut 2 x 865mm lengths, or to a length that fits the width desired for your gate – it may differ from ours. Slot them into the indented posts to form your gate frame.

16 Screw the second side panel in place with 45mm screws. Paint coop with two coats of Resene Lumbersider 'Powder Blue'. Paint trims with 'Quarter Thorndon Cream'. Leave the nesting area unpainted.

17 Cut metal capping to 1820mm, so there is a slight overhang at the ends. Prime with Resene General Purpose Metal Primer then paint. Screw in place with 25mm screws. Paint again.

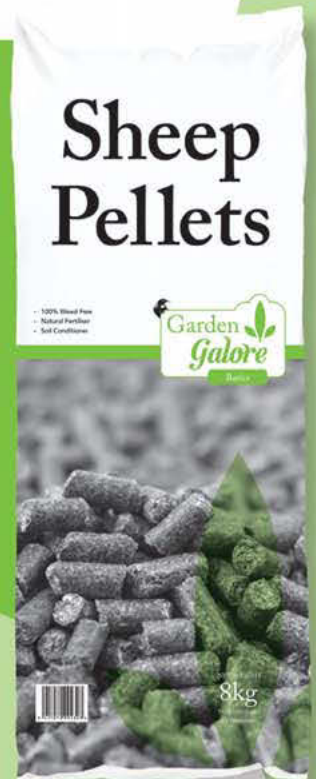
18 Screw the remaining hinges to the bottom door. Cut wire netting to fit door, then staple to the inside framework. Fix door to coop. Then finish stapling wire netting to the rest of coop.

19 Screw the wheels to the front blocks using the bugle batten screws, placing a washer before and after the screw head.

20 Use another offcut to make a door stop, as shown, which can be turned to allow the door to open. Screw in place. Screw on the handles – two at the back for lifting the coop, and the other one on the top door panel.

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OUR PANEL THIS MONTH:
Sheryn Clothier, Robert Guyton, Ruud Kleinpaste

Ask an expert

FRUIT & VEGE GROWING ADVICE THIS MONTH

Q CROSS BREEDING
Can pumpkins and zucchinis cross-breed? I planted seed of both in a couple of large trays and lost the tags, so didn't know what was what when I planted them out. I seem to be getting just zucchini off my plants so far.
SARAH MCCAMBRIDGE, TIMARU

A Pumpkins and zucchinis can actually pollinate each other... but rest assured nothing untoward happened under the ground between your seedlings, it happens when they flower and set seed! Cucurbits cross readily with

other cucurbits of the same species. So cucumbers (*Cucumis sativus*) and rockmelons (*Cucumis melo*) don't pollinate each other, but pumpkins and zucchini do because they are both *Cucurbita pepo*. This potential for cross-pollination means these plants aren't true to type, so if you harvest seed any resulting plants might not have the same desirable traits as the parent plant. If you want seed for a particular variety, you'll need to hand pollinate. Find a ripe female flower not yet open and tape it shut in the evening, so it can't open by itself and be pollinated with who-knows-what the next day. The next morning, open the female flower and use a paintbrush to transfer pollen from a male flower from another plant of the same variety, then re-tape the female flower shut. Label it with a ribbon, and if fruit sets, harvest that seed.

Jo McCarroll

Q AVOS FROM SEED
I read in a recent issue of NZ Gardener that you can grow an avocado by suspending a stone with toothpicks over a glass of water so the bottom just sits in water. I thought I would give this a go, and – what do you know? – roots appeared. What next?
JUNITA GARDENER,
GRETA VALLEY

A Avocados don't like cold winters, and since you are in the South Island, you'll need to keep it in a conservatory as a pot plant. A seedling avocado takes up to 15 years to fruit, and since it's a seedling, no-one knows how good, large or tasty the fruit will be. But it will make an attractive, lush pot plant until then! Avocados naturally grow huge so to keep it small, pinch out the top two or four leaves when it is about 17cm. When it has sent out new shoots after that, transfer to a pot (25-30cm). Fill the pot a little then dangle the seed so that only half will be buried and fill with potting mix. Water in but don't over-water, as avocados get root rot – yellow leaves are a sign of over-watering. Keep in a sunny place and pinch out new growth every 10cm. In two years, transfer it to its final pot, as big as you can fit in the space. If it starts getting too big, prune harder. Take a branch off every year, rotating around the tree so each branch is removed every five or six years. Also, avocados require pollination from a different avocado tree to fruit... you might want to sprout another one too.

Sheryn Clothier





Q **HOTHOUSE WOES**
I'm new to gardening and this spring I planted cucumbers, capsicum, tomatoes and basil in my glasshouse. They were all doing well, then one capsicum developed little black spots, which spread first to the other capsicums, then to my tomatoes in just a few days. What can I do to make sure the soil is safe to plant again and to avoid the problem next summer?
 FRANCES HUNT, UPPER HUTT

A Do not fret Frances – these things happen to even the most experienced of us, especially in the glasshouse. I'd guess you had a serious case of target spot virus, but you can avoid it in the future by following the simplest of rules for undercover-growing: keep it dry. Most ailments suffered in the hothouse come about as a result of too much moisture combined with the warmth. The solution is to ventilate like crazy and water in the morning so the leaves don't sit wet over night. If there's any sign of virus or fungi, get rid of infected plants straight away, burning them to halt the disease. If you are really determined, you can also change the soil in the glasshouse. Most often that isn't necessary, and simple cultivation and exposure to light and air will fix the problem. There are various products that will blitz the soil, but I'm not a fan of them. My recommendation: clean up everything that went spotty, and try some different crops in the meantime. Next season, keep the atmosphere inside as fresh and breezy as you can.
 Robert Guyton

Q **WHAT'S THIS PEST?**
This has been a problem for the past three years on my tomatoes, despite changing the soil and site. The leaves curl up and wither in December and January. Inside the stem is a larvae which becomes a cocoon, but we have not identified the insect.
 CHRIS RUMBALL, CHRISTCHURCH

A I don't see this beastie often, but the name rolls easily off the tongue: *Symmetrischema tangiolas*. Entomologists predictably, and boringly, call it the tomato stem borer. It hails from South America and it's a specialist on solanums, damaging a range of plant species in that family. Young caterpillars chew their way into the stems which they hollow out, causing wilting and often death. They pupate inside the stems too, but first chew a small hole to the outside world so the moth stage that follows can escape and mate. There are three to four generations in New Zealand, and these cohorts tend to overlap, so you will be able to find active caterpillars most months of the year. Infested stems should be disposed of properly, rather than chucking them on the compost heap. Poroporo appears to be an important host here and get rid of any solanum weeds. Tomato stems can be protected by spraying the bases with tough, systemic insecticides. Zonda (zonda.net.nz) sells pheromone caps that works exactly like codling moth traps, luring male tomato stem borers to their death, giving you early warning of their presence so you can treat to prevent an infestation.
 Ruud Kleinpaste

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FRESH APRICOTS DON'T LAST LONG, so preserve their golden goodness with this boozy treat, from *Preserves*, by Pam Corbin.

START BY MAKING THE BRANDY SYRUP.

Put 100g of honey and 400ml water in a pan, heat gently until honey is dissolved then add the finely grated zest of one orange and 100ml of brandy. Set aside. Halve the apricots, twist apart and remove the stones. Pack the fruit into 2 x 500ml sterilised jars. Prod a cinnamon stick and some bruised cardamon pods inside. Pour the hot brandy syrup over the fruit until full to the brim. Tap to remove any air bubbles. Seal with a lid, and screw on bands lightly. Place in a large deep pan and cover in warm water. Bring slowly to a simmer then cook for 20 minutes. Remove, tighten screw-bands, and leave for 24 hours before storing in a cool, dark place.

PEOPLE & PLANTS

Lynda Hallinan gets a helping hand from some WWOOFER friends



BETTER LATE THAN...

Lynda Hallinan picks her star players – the bold and the beautiful – for a display of drought-tolerant, easy-care colour in late summer

PHOTOS: SALLY TAGG

It was the driest possible start to the year. The driest January on record, the driest a January could be. In an average year, our corner of Hunua, on Auckland's south-eastern fringe, can expect about 95mm in January, but this year our rain gauge didn't catch a single millimetre. Zero, zip, zilch. Not a drop.

It's amazing – not to mention amazingly frustrating when the tide's out in your water tank – to see how localised rainfall can be. Farming neighbours less than a kilometre up the road were gifted 11mm by the weather gods. But the dark clouds that gathered on a couple of days, flirting suggestively with my flagging spirits, delivered only a delicate spritz of drizzle on our block before skirting our valley to dump their precious cargo in the bush-clad Hunua Ranges.

It wasn't just dry. It was sweltering. It was the hottest summer I can remember in years, the sort of summer that should be spent at the beach, not stuck at home watering, weeding... and pleading for rain.

Anyone who has ever opened their gates for a special summer event – be it a wedding or, in my case, hospice garden festival – will know how tricky it is. Without water, annuals and perennials hunker down and focus on sheer survival rather than putting on a spectacle. Their blooms are fewer and further between, even when you're mulching, deadheading religiously and recycling every drop of grey water you have. (On the plus side, all the weeds had a terrible time in the drought too, and our French WWOOFers, Quentin

Ferdeau and Valentin Lambert, pictured on page 43, made short work of them.)

What I have learned this summer is that there's a big difference between perennials that tolerate drought, and perennials that thrive in the dry. Though lots of plants are billed as drought-tolerant, very few actually look any good when the going gets tough. If you don't want to resort to a cactus and succulent garden, here are three easy-care but endlessly colourful plant combinations to try next summer. I've divided them into small (to 30cm), medium (to 60cm), large (up to 1m) and extra large (for the back of borders).

- 1 Coreopsis – both the quick-to-flower annuals and hardy perennials – deserve to be more widely grown. These daisies come in yellow, cream, yellow/bronze and burnt sienna.**
- 2 Gaillardia 'Arizona Sun' is an award-winning, low-growing native American blanket flower. If you don't get around to dead-heading it, it still looks attractive with drumstick seedheads when the petals fall. Plant at the front of beds.**
- 3 Orange annual *Cosmos sulphureus* blooms all summer and self-seeds generously; sow it once and it'll give you years of free pleasure. Essential for wildflower borders.**
- 4 *Rudbeckia hirta* 'Toto' rivals sunflowers for golden impact.**
- 5 I plant dahlias, dahlias and more dahlias! This flamboyant fringed variety is 'Show 'n' Tell'. Use stakes for support.**
- 6 Mass-planted, *Rudbeckia fulgida* 'Goldsturm' is a sensation.**
- 7 The upright South African shrub *Leonotis leonurus*, also known as lion's tail, has wonderful whorled orange flowers.**
- 8 I cannot rave enough about the tall, terrific, bee-friendly *Helenium* 'Moerheim Beauty'. It's dead easy to divide too.**

EASY-CARE HOT COLOURS



NEVER

When the going gets tough, some perennials – such as bronze-orange *Helenium* ‘Moerheim Beauty’, golden *Rudbeckia hirta* ‘Toto’, and the double-flowered daisy *Helianthus* ‘Lodden Gold’ – tough it out while still providing plenty of stems to pick.



If you prefer feminine pinks and pastels — colours more traditionally associated with a spring cottage garden than a hot summer border — try these frothy annuals and pretty pink perennials.

If I was a plant breeder intent on finding fame and fortune, I wouldn't waste my efforts trying to breed the elusive blue rose. I'd dedicate my life's work to inventing a herbaceous peony that flowers in late summer. I've lost count of the number of friends who, having seen pictures of romantic peony bouquets in bridal magazines, won't take no for an answer when I try to explain that these full-figured beauties aren't available year-round. (Unless, of course, you want to carry a bunch of life-like plastic peonies up the church aisle.)

In late summer, hot colours abound. If you're after orange, red or yellow flowers, you're spoiled for choice. But if you prefer a more subtle display of soft-coloured feminine flowers at this time of the year, the pickings can be slim.

There's also the dilemma of what to do with the unexpected, yet inevitable, vacancies that appear in perennial borders when spring-flowering plants either cark it or start to look so shabby that a severe summer haircut is the only appropriate course of action.

Tall annual pincushions (*Scabiosa atropurpurea*), in shades of pale lavender, pink and white, are one of the mainstays of my long border in spring. They flower for weeks and are quite lovely, but then all of a sudden they decide it's time to call it a day. And when they do, they leave great gaping holes in the middle of the garden.

These holes are too big for my usual quick fix — an emergency infusion of potted colour — so this year I plugged the gaps with the new magenta-flowered *Salvia* 'Wendy's Wish' and a dozen XXL and Hypnotica series dahlias. (How handy it is that nurseries have cottoned on to the fact that modern gardeners aren't as organised as our ancestors. Dahlias, once only available as dormant tubers for winter planting, are increasingly sold as potted plants already in bloom.)

SMALL (to 30cm) For pink bedding colour from late summer until autumn, plant **annual asters**, **dwarf cosmos** and **zinnias**. Slip in clumps of **perennial calibrachos** as groundcover. These hybrid small-flowered petunias look lovely spilling over retaining walls and gravel paths. I'm also a fan of **achilleas** or perennial yarrows. They flower from late spring until autumn if you cut off the old flowers as they fade. They are long-stemmed and long-lasting as cut flowers; easy to propagate by division; and they spread quickly (a handy quality in a large garden) to cover new ground. The only downside is that they tend to flop over mid-season. This is a pain, especially if you want to fill vases with the white bobbles of ***Achillea* 'The Pearl'**. It's tricky to arrange with bendy stems!

MEDIUM (30-60cm) **Phygelius** — in pink, cream and red — has been a hit around my roses. These tidy perennials haven't been without bloom since November and, if I'm a bit slack dead-heading, they use their initiative and send up side buds without prompting. **'The Princess' lavender**, a new pink-flowered release last year, did well in its second year. Completely unfazed by drought?

Echinacea purpurea, which is also happily spawning seedlings.

LARGE (up to 1m) All salvias relish hot, dry weather and rose sage (***Salvia involucrata***) is particularly versatile. The most common — in availability and character — is the garish magenta variety 'Bethellii', which towers up to 1.5m. I prefer its more demure siblings, 'Mulberry Jam' and 'Boutin', at 1m. Order from Marshwood Gardens in Invercargill. Pair with ***Gaura lindheimeri* 'Siskiyou Pink'**, **penstemons** and ***Aster* 'Royal Ruby'**.

XL (1m+) There aren't many truly towering summer cottage gems — rusty hollyhocks aside! — but two must-haves for feathery plumes are ***Verbena bonariensis*** and the delightful ***Thalictrum delavayi***.

- 1 ***Achillea* 'Gloria Jean'** (from Marshwood Gardens).
- 2 Buy dwarf cosmos or sow tall 'Candy Stripe' (Kings Seeds).
- 3 **Phygelius** come in shades of pink, red and cream.
- 4 Sow or divide ***Echinacea purpurea*** for a massed display.
- 5 ***Salvia involucrata* 'Boutin'** is a marshmallow pink rose sage.
- 6 Lemon bergamot, ***Monarda citriodora***, is an annual herb.
- 7 ***Thalictrum delavayi*** looks like a cloud of lilac gypsophila.
- 8 Every cottage garden — even in the heat — needs sweet peas.

HARDY COTTAGE CHARMERS



It's still possible to achieve a spring cottage look in summer, both in your garden and in a vase.



5

L



6



7

XL



8

Blue and purple can be surprisingly hard to come by in late summer, agapanthus and hydrangeas being the notable – and familiar – exceptions. Not that either of these plants deserve to be sneered at. We have agapanthus at our farm gate (along with ‘Flower Carpet Red’ roses, which are equally invincible), while bushy hydrangeas are the only flowering shrub I’ve found that can stand the parched soil underneath our established oak and horse chestnut trees. Mind you, they started out pink: it took only two years for these chameleons to turn blue in our acid soil.

LARGE (up to 1m) Last summer, I gloated that **delphiniums** were the stars of this garden, but I subsequently lost the lot to crown rot. However, their cousins, **annual larkspurs**, while not so showy, graciously set seed and resow here each year. I can’t decide if the wallflower *Erysimum* ‘**Bowles’s Mauve**’ should be treated as a perennial or a shrub (a shrubby perennial, perhaps?) but there’s no denying its beauty and fragrance. After a big spring flush, it produces intermittent blooms throughout summer. As summer leans into autumn, **michaelmas daisies** come into their own. **XL (1m+)** **Salvias** are long-flowering and hardy, as are **blue globe thistles** and the popcorn-flowered *Hydrangea* ‘**Ayesha**’.

The garden in front of our horse stables began life as a rose border before being turned into a herb garden, but now it’s a repository for random purchases I couldn’t resist at the garden centre!

SMALL (to 30cm) For drought-tolerant blue or purple-flowered groundcover, plant **native pratia**, **annual petunias**, **perennial violas**, **sweet violets**, **scaevola**, **nemesias** and **verbenas**. Slip in herbs such as **purple sage**, **purple basil** and **cinnamon basil**, which has striking purple stems. I’ve also planted ‘**Purple Beauty**’ **capsicums** in this garden, not because I’m so anally retentive that my food is colour-coordinated with my flowers, but because bell peppers do need a little extra love (in the form of irrigation) in summer, so I plant mine close to the house, and the hose tap. **MEDIUM (30-60cm)** Take your pick from **annual and perennial statice**, electric blue sea holly (*Eryngium planum*), sky blue *Salvia patens* and purple **verbenas**.

1 Fan flowers (*Scaevola* ‘**Amethyst**’) have a naturally trailing habit that makes them ideal for tucking at the front of beds.
2 Stocky ‘**Purple Beauty**’ capsicums.
3 Perennial statice, *Limonium perezii*.
4 The small-fruited grafted eggplant ‘**Ophelia**’ is ready to eat when the fruit reach the size of a pear.
5 A connoisseur’s chilli, this is ‘**Black Pearl**’, with liquorice foliage, purple flowers and shiny – and very spicy – baubles.
6 Unlike low-growing bedding lobelias, *Lobelia x speciosa* ‘**Vedrariensis**’ reaches skyward with towering terminal racemes of deep blue. Propagate by seed or division.
7 *Salvia* ‘**Amistad**’ grows up to 1.8m with near black bracts to set off its purple petals. Cut back to keep compact.
8 Steely blue, sculptural globe thistles, *Echinops ritro*.

BLACK, BLUE & BOUNTIFUL



S



2



M



4



L



6



XL



8

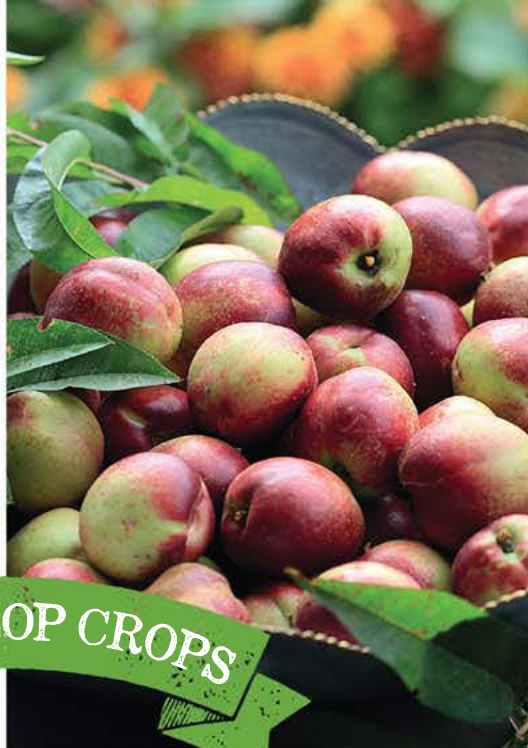




TOMATILLOS: I've finally cracked it! After three failed attempts in the past, this year my tomatillos (*Physalis philadelphica*) are fair laden with fat green fruit. These unusual frost-tender edibles, which look like a cross between a green tomato and a giant cape gooseberry, are a staple ingredient in Mexican salsa verde. Raw or roasted, they are delicious blitzed with hot jalapeno or serrano chillies, fresh coriander and a splash of fresh lime juice. To grow tomatillos, sow seed (from Kings Seeds) in spring. Sow in trays and raise the plants to a decent size (10cm) before transplanting, then protect with a sprinkle of slug bait until established.

March top & flop CROPS

*Lynda's regular roundup of
the best & worst performers
in her Hunua garden*



TOP & FLOP CROPS



SALSA: Tomatillos. Check.

Jalapeno peppers. Check. Verdant clumps of coriander. Check. Don't you love it when all the ingredients of your favourite dish come together? (Shame I still have to buy the limes for my salsa verde!) I am particularly chuffed that the coriander didn't bolt to seed in the heat.



'MABEL' NECTARINES:

These purple-foliaged fruit trees are always a talking point when I open my garden to the public, and this year was no exception. Not only do they look stunning in a grove (I have seven trees), they produced a great crop of shiny, dark red, white-fleshed, sweet and juicy fruit. And because it's a late-ripening variety, it didn't succumb to brown rot.



'TOMATOBERRY' CHERRY TOMATOES:

I grew this prolific, slightly plum-shaped cherry tomato last summer on Margaret Barker's recommendation (she reckons it's one of the hardiest varieties for southern gardens). I didn't plant it again this year because I didn't need to: free seedlings popped up all around my compost bin, which proved handy because I simply tied them to the sides of the bin and let them go to it. I'm sure tomatoes taste sweeter when free.



'PEANUTS': My plants aren't

quite ready to uproot but after a sneaky (but very gentle) bit of bandicooting, I can see dozens of pods forming around the roots. Homemade peanut butter from scratch: I can't wait!



'GOLDMINE' NECTARINES:

Brown rot claimed all my 'Queen Giant' nectarines then moved on to ruin my 'Goldmine' crop (pictured above) as well. Over one weekend, we picked the whole lot, chopped out the rotten bits and made dozens of jars of nectarine jam and chutney while the pigs feasted on the rest. Raking up all the rotten windfall fruit, and picking off any shrivelled/mummified fruit clinging to the branches, is an important part of organic orchard management. It helps to prevent the spread of spores and reduces the risk of reinfection next season.



RUNNER BEANS: We finally

enjoyed our first meal of 'Scarlet Runner' beans in the second week of February. They were so slow to get going this season, which wouldn't usually be a problem except all my dwarf beans were eaten by rabbits.



'FLATTO' PEACHES: For

the first time since I put them in three years ago, my heirloom 'Flatto' peaches had a reasonable load of quirky flattened fruit. Unfortunately, I was so busy getting the garden festival-ready that I clean forgot to pick them. Thieving blackbirds did that job for me.



PURPLE BASIL: Even if it wasn't edible, I'd plant 'Dark Opal' basil just for the ornamental value

of its shiny black leaves. Sadly, slugs find it irresistible and attacked my seedlings the first night after transplanting. But in a serendipitous twist, self-sown 'Genovese' basil popped up to take its place. 🌿

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The Coromandel garden was designed on high-to-low-to-high basis, using the existing pohutukawa trees to frame the house.

native cliff



hanger

A coastal garden on a cliff face north of Tairua has been designed to seamlessly merge with the surrounding bush

STORY: RACHEL CLARE PHOTOS: SALLY TAGG

Natural springs were enhanced to create two waterfalls to the left of the pool.



When award-winning landscape designer Bill Holden was invited to create a garden on a cliff face just north of Tairua in the Coromandel, he decided to go to sea – literally. The owner had specified one main design goal for the garden: it had to blend seamlessly with the landscape and be as invisible as possible from any vantage point. So Bill brought his boat up from Rotorua, where he was living at the time, launched it from Tairua Harbour and sailed it up the coast until he could see the excavated site. It wasn't hard to miss. "There was a massive scar on the landscape, so immediately I knew my task was to make that scar disappear once the house was constructed." He took some photos, did a spot of fishing, then headed back home to get started.

He chose a palette of natives from genera that grow naturally in the coastal landscape: phormium (flaxes), muehlenbeckia, leptospermum, pseudopanax (five-finger) and coprosma. To create structure and provide terracing for stability he added rocks, lots and lots of rocks – 400 tonnes, in fact. It was important to Bill that the rock matched the walls of the house and was local, which would reduce the garden's carbon footprint. Not that this made it any easier; delivery and positioning rocks was definitely the biggest challenge of the job.

"It was the side of a cliff. Man, I did some hair-raising sweating. It was a nightmare, all through the winter of 2010." He admits they lost one or two off the side: "I'd hear crash, crash, crash down to the sea." Fortunately, the rocky shore below is inaccessible to the public. But now the rocks form a framework on this 2ha section.

Bill's rule for rock placement is that in order for them to appear natural, they must be planted in the ground one-third in, two-thirds out, so that in three or four years only about a quarter of the rock is visible as the garden grows up around it.

Five years on, boulders at the top of the gully overlooking the sea are submerged in pillowy mounds of *Coprosma acerosa* 'Hawera', which look bouncy enough to lie on. The plant is a favourite of Bill's – and the wild rabbits. Karen Pinnington, the gardener who has been working on the property since day one, is encouraging the coprosma to grow into a carpet and says the secret to its bounciness is sheep manure and lots of blood and bone. "Natives love the old blood and bone – nothing flash," says Bill.

Rock terracing was also critical for one of the earliest stages of the job, which was to come up with a solution for the gully leading down to the shore 44m below. At that point, there was no track down to the sea but Bill told the owner that for his design to work he still needed to give the impression you could get down there. So he created a path that zigzagged part way down the cliff and planted the gully with native flaxes *Phormium tenax* and *Phormium cookianum*, cabbage trees and the large-leaved kowhai, *Sophora tetraptera*, making it a five-star restaurant for visiting tui and kereru.

By now you may have gathered Bill is a bit of a rock man. His father was creating rock gardens using alpine plants back in the 1960s for farmers around Rotorua. "I loved creating gardens with my dad," says Bill. "We also propagated alpine plants and would sell them."

Gardener Karen Pinnington
with dog Red and landscape
designer Bill Holden.



The “hard basket” area of the house was one of the last to be completed. Karen could only fit 6m³ of soil onto the hard clay bank. *Blechnum novae-zelandiae* and renga renga lilies surround a carpet of *Pratia angulata*.





Clockwise from top left:
Blechnum novae-zelandiae;
Muehlenbeckia complexa;
Coprosma 'Poor Knights'
 and *Muehlenbeckia axillaris*;
Coprosma 'Hawera'

Many of the southern alpine plants couldn't cope with Rotorua conditions but some, like the Marlborough rock daisy, have endured and are commonly planted there today. Sadly, Bill's father never lived to see how his passion had passed on to his son, who has won many awards from the Landscaping Industries Association of New Zealand.

Bill is quick to credit Karen with a lot of the success of the Tairua garden; she spends around 14 hours a week there. "Often you'll create a garden, then go back a few years later and feel disappointed that it hasn't been maintained. Karen has continued to help the garden evolve and I'm really happy with how it looks." Karen, who looks after many of the large gardens in the area, has done the hard yards from the beginning, digging in 20 truckloads of mulch and planting out most of the property. As well as pruning and fertilising she replaces ailing plants with different ones – if they can't cope with the extreme coastal conditions, they're out.

Such was the fate of the renga renga lilies planted on a shaded clay slope, which Bill describes as a "hard basket" area. The famously fussy plants started dying so Karen has replaced them with Australian frangipani.



Manuka



Marlborough rock daisy

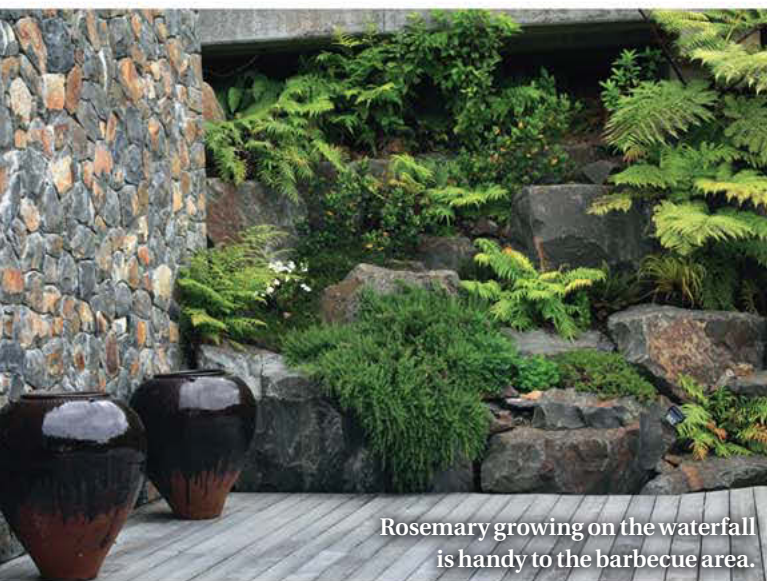


Muehlenbeckia axillaris



Guest accommodation leads onto a rooftop garden planted with *Carex secta* and *Muehlenbeckia astonii*.

In winter, heavy rain causes the hillside to leak, and natural springs to run through the property



Rosemary growing on the waterfall is handy to the barbecue area.



Luckily, Bill isn't a purist and doesn't mind a few offshore plants intruding into his native scheme.

The shade-loving native groundcover *Pratia angulata* thrives in this tricky corner, even surviving the attentions of the resident quail. One of the stalwarts here, which has provided stability from erosion and a microclimate for other plants, is the five-finger hybrid *Pseudopanax lessonii* 'Cyril Watson', named after a former employee at the New Plymouth-based nursery Duncan & Davies. It's one of Bill's favourites because "it grows in clay, is hardy, grows quite quickly and has pretty foliage with a nice layered texture to it". But if a prize could be awarded for speed, it would go to the *Pittosporum crassifolium*, which Bill says is one of the fastest-growing native revegetation plants.

If developing a garden on a steep clifftop with hard clay wasn't challenge enough, the weather soon presented new problems. In winter, heavy rain causes the hillside to leak, and natural springs to run through the property. These created a wonderful swimming pool for Karen's dogs but turned the site into a quagmire that was dangerous for operating machinery. The architect dealt with the problem by running one of

the water courses under the house and down the cliff. He also suggested retaining the bank above the house with gabions in wire baskets. "The owner wasn't sure," says Bill, "so I said, 'Why don't you turn them into natural water features using large rocks?'" It was a considerable investment and the owner took some convincing, but Bill drew up some plans and he agreed.

Today the watercourses have been tamed into waterfalls, one creating an oasis-like backdrop to the swimming pool and the other a living wall next to the kitchen. While the poolside waterfall has been beefed up with a tank and pump, the one beside the house runs on its own supply and Karen says the water thunders in heavy rain, sometimes overflowing onto the courtyard. Watercress, which the owners pick and eat, grows amid its rocks alongside native *Fuchsia procumbens*, ponga and the palm-leaf fern *Blechnum novae-zelandiae*.

Despite the continual need for problem-solving, Bill says the garden is easily one of the best he has created. "My heart was always in it, but man, it was no cakewalk." But perhaps it's the most challenging projects that provide the most satisfying outcomes. ❀



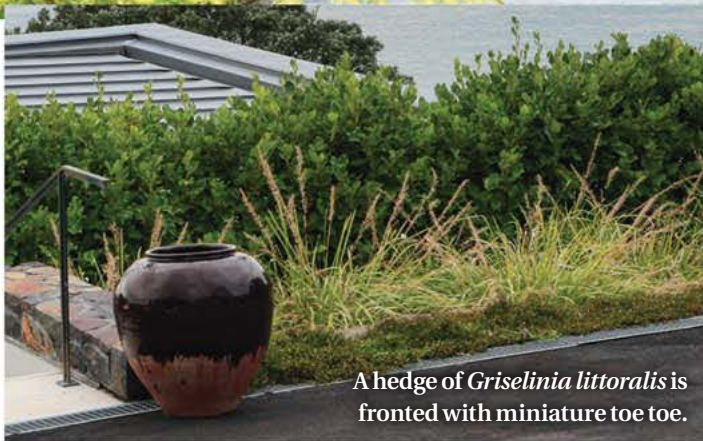
Rock terracing and native planting create a tranquil poolside setting.



Muehlenbeckia complexa



Blechnum capense



A hedge of *Griselinia littoralis* is fronted with miniature toe toe.



Pseudopanax 'Cyril Watson'



Flax

Pick & mix

"Being a native garden there's less dependence on flowering species," says Bill, "so the placement of plants becomes critical to create an interesting array."

Flaxes and five-finger plant (*Pseudopanax lessonii*) create structure, offset by the soft forms of sedge *Carex secta* and miniature toe toe. *Muehlenbeckia* is a versatile plant that can provide groundcover or be clipped into soft, sculptural forms.



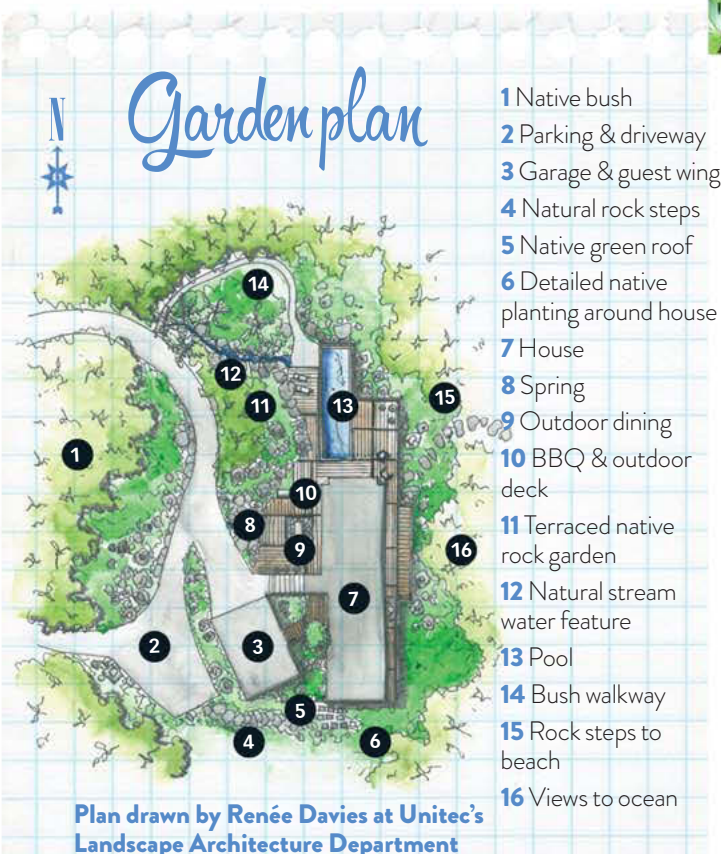
Hebe from the Wiri series



Chionochloa flavicans



Carex secta





Clockwise from above: *Cercis* 'Forest Pansy' with *Teucrium fruitcans* hedge; Climbing rose 'Westerland'; *Lychnis chalcidonica* seedheads in summer; Oriental lily; *Helleborus corsicus* (front) in spring; Lancewoods and box balls frame the front door.



SOUTH ISLAND



house on the Little Prairie

Robyn Kilty's Christchurch cottage garden was always popular with visitors – and then the quakes came. But from the ruins she has now created a Piet Oudolf-style prairie garden in a courtyard-sized space!

STORY: ROBYN KILTY PHOTOS: JULIET NICHOLAS





The author framed by ornamental grape *Vitis vinifera* 'Purpurea'.

I love prairie gardens. I used to drool over photos of misty swathes of grasses and seed-heads backlit by the setting sun

It was the chimney falling through the ceiling that finally forced me out of my home and away from my beloved cottage garden. But it was also then that I began to see a glimmer of light, because living in my temporary home – a cottage at Flaxmere, a garden of national significance owned by my friend Penny Zino – that inspired the next step on my gardening journey. Unsurprisingly, Penny and I got talking about gardens, and discovered we shared a love of the prairie style. By the time I returned to my cottage almost a year later, I was ready to turn my dream into reality.

Recently the term “prairie garden” has gentrified into either “perennial meadows” or the “new perennial movement”. We haven’t yet seen this style of gardening in New Zealand, but for the past 20 years it has been hot news in the Northern Hemisphere. I would drool over magazine photos of misty swathes of grasses, perennials and seed-heads backlit by the setting sun or sparkling in frost, and was not disappointed when I saw my first Piet Oudolf design at Wisley in Surrey and later at Scampston Hall in Yorkshire. The opportunity came up for Penny and I to attend a workshop at Piet’s garden, Hummelo in Holland. His naturalistic gardens were to die for. “Can I really make a small prairie garden around a cottage in the southern hemisphere?” I asked. “Yes,” said Piet. “You can use the prairie style to make a garden almost anywhere, adapting and using the plants suitable to your geographical situation.”

That was our lightbulb moment: Penny decided to plant a prairie, and I knew I could definitely transform part of my own sad little garden into a mini-version. The Canterbury Plains are rather like North American prairies geographically and climatically: I thought this hardy, sustainable method of gardening would be ideal for our hot, dry summers and cold, snowy winters.

After the Christchurch earthquakes, the infrastructure of my cottage garden had been damaged almost beyond repair. Then came weeks of shock and misery and my garden looking so sad and untended, with no heart to put it back together again. The broken steps, the twisted fence, and the rose arch over the gate now in a drunken lurch, all seemed to leer at me.

On my return, I decided the whole space in the front of the house should become prairie. (It was a different matter for the side and back gardens, however, where I couldn’t resist retaining some old pink and purple cottage garden favourites.) No symmetrical cross-axis of brick paths lined with box balls as before. No cute little twisted picket fence and lurching arch as before; just garden. The six standard ‘Colourbreak’ roses were sold on Trade Me, as was the arch and its red climbing roses ‘Parkdirektor Riggers’ and ‘Altissimo’. The *Prunus serrulata* ‘Ukon’ had grown too big so was removed, as were the two cabbage trees that stood sentinel either side of the garden. The two red *Rosa moyesii* ‘Geranium’ at either end of the brick path were given away, as were all the red flowering perennials. Red was not the flavour of the month any more. It had to be orange – the brighter and more outrageous the colour, the better. I was ruthless and unsentimental. If the earth can be tough, then so can I.

I still needed a fence of some sort and a path to the veranda and front door. A lovely old rusty gate spied at a demolition yard was the catalyst. No way could I have a nice little picket fence now: it had to be rustic. The positive efforts of post-quake transitional garden charity Greening the Rubble and furniture makers Rekindle had really impressed me, so I opted for a recycled fence.

My fencer turned up with a trailer-load of old timber picked up from one of the many heaps around the city.



The prairie garden in spring, with the early red growth of the tree peony, front right, next to *Astelia chathamica* 'Silver Spear' and *Carex buechananii*.



Side garden illuminated by *Wisteria floribunda* 'Snow Showers'; and *Phormium* 'Evening Glow'.



Delphinium 'Black Knight'



Opium poppy



Mosaic back path lined with santolina.



'Claude Monet'



'Burgundy Iceberg'



'Ghislaine de Féligonde'

We put the fence in a day. He hung the gate and I stained the recycled fence blue over its many uneven shades and textures. Magically it blended with the grey-blue of the repainted cottage. Instead of ordinary brick steps and a path to the front door, what a great excuse to make more mosaics! The predominant colours of the newly repainted house were orange and greyish-blue, so I made an oval mosaiced platform, visualising it as a resting place amid a meadow of waving grasses and orange flowers.

Then came the real fun: planting. Some plants from the original garden were useful as an evergreen winter framework, including a pair of lancewoods (*Pseudopanax crassifolius*) either side of the front steps, and some box balls (*Buxus sempervirens*) that were reused informally to make irregular clusters either side of the oval platform. A low blue-grey hedge (*Teucrium fruticans*) that separates the garden from the drive was retained for its colour, which links with the house, as were clumps of *Astelia chathamica* 'Silver Spear', which were divided and replanted in diagonal corners of the garden.

To replace the overgrown cherry tree, *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy' was planted for its delicious red pansy-shaped leaves – I fancied bronze foliage amid the orange flowers. The other deciduous shrubs introduced for shape and colour were two coral-orange spring-flowering *Chaenomeles x superba* 'Cameo', growing as standards on either side of the rusty gate. To add more height, two groups of tall, rusty reinforcing rods were set in the centre of each meadow, either side of the platform. Underneath these were planted *Muehlenbeckia complexa*, destined to twine their way up the rusty rods.

I wanted to give this southern hemisphere prairie a New Zealand identity, which is why so many natives were used as the evergreen backbone. I used *Carex buechananii* as what prairie-gardeners call the matrix, or basic, plant of the garden, as it is a relatively tall-growing tussock and should be able to compete with the taller exotic perennials, as well as forming the desired bronze backdrop to those orange flowers. Another native grass I used was *Deschampsia cespitosa*, a graceful, cold-hardy tall green grass, purchased from Arne Cleland's Pukerau Nursery in Gore.



Verbena bonariensis



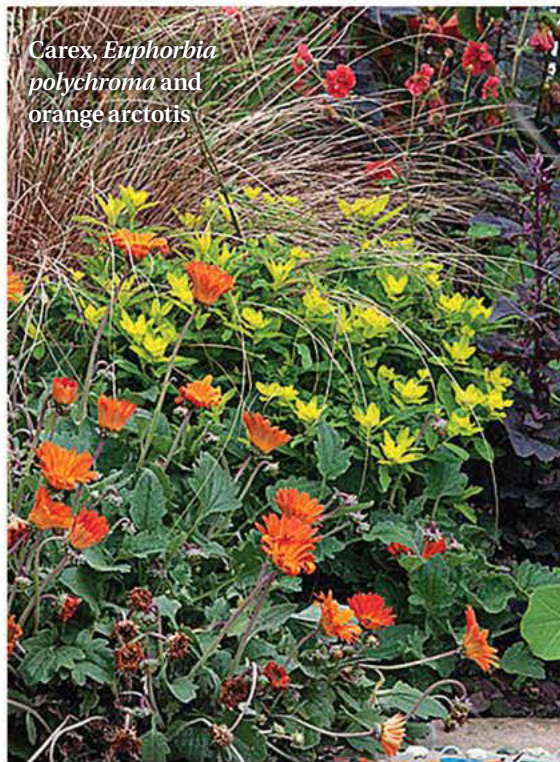
Red orach



Bronze fennel



Helenium 'Moerheim Beauty'



Carex, Euphorbia polychroma and orange arctotis



Chaenomeles 'Cameo'



Carex buchananii



Canna lily foliage

Carex buchananii is the matrix plant, as it is relatively tall and should be able to compete with the exotic perennials

At last, the flowers: gold, orange and terracotta lilies, orange tulips, scarlet and orange geums, scarlet and orange dahlias, bronze and terracotta heleniums, orange arctotis, nasturtiums in all colours, bronze-orange achillea, the scarlet Maltese Cross (*Lychnis chalcidonica*), and two varieties of orange-flowered canna lilies, all of these in clumps massed and repeated throughout the garden and finding their way up throughout spring and summer between the carpet of bronze *Carex buchananii*.

There's more – the “weeds” that seed everywhere! These are valued for height and form: red orach (*Atriplex hortensis* var. *rubra*) for brilliant foliage; *Verbena bonariensis* for spaced-out purple flowers; and bronze fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare* 'Purpureum') for texture.

Visitors used to feel comfortable looking at my old rosy cottage garden. It was pretty and reasonably organised. Now, many people think my tiny prairie garden is rather crazy because the plants grow so tall in such a small space. They think it looks like work, but the truth is I've never had such an easy garden. You just let everything grow up, there is no space for weeds and the plants hold each other up – which is precisely what I love about it. ❀



Geum 'Mrs Bradshaw'



Liliium martagon

New Wave

Prairie planting emerged in the 1980s as part of the green movement in Holland and Germany. Woodlands and meadows have been an intrinsic part of the Northern Europeans' approach to gardening, compared to the English herbaceous style. The Dutch plantsman Piet Oudolf was one of those looking for a more sustainable way to design and make gardens; gardens that weren't labour intensive, didn't need artificial fertilisers and watering, and were made up of survivor plants. He was inspired by the flat meadows of the Dutch countryside and American designers such as Jens Jensen and James van Sweden, who used the perennials and grasses of the North American prairies. He adapted this style to Northern Europe, which soon became popularised as the naturalistic prairie garden movement so prevalent in the Northern Hemisphere today.



TALK TO YOUR PLANTS

Xanthe White gets back to nature with *Rudbeckia fulgida*, the prairie garden star that shines year-round

PORTRAIT: EMMA BASS

Q Yellow is not an easy colour in the garden. Soft flickers mixed through a palette of blue are ever-popular but a real, hot yellow doesn't often make it to the top of people's wish list. That's probably one reason why I love you in my garden; you're the bright, beautiful flower that's overlooked in conservative colour schemes.

A It is funny. Sometimes I think people are afraid of yellow because it reminds them of poisonous snakes, but maybe not everyone likes to stand out; they think to be bold is to be garish. It's a bit of a New Zealand thing – overseas it's a different story.

Q Yes, you really are part of the "new cool" in America and Europe, featuring in the High Line park in New York and the work of designers such as Tom Stuart-Smith and Piet Oudolf. Could you tell us more?

A The prairie garden or new perennial movement is all about a more naturalistic approach to design. For one, plants are selected for hardiness. Also it's not just the flowers that are the focus of a composition – seed heads and texture are just as important. This is one of the reasons that rudbeckias have become the star attraction: like echinaceas, we have beautiful architectural cones that protrude above the petals. We are of the huge Asteraceae family, and you can see that in our petals, which is that classic daisy look. The difference is that as the flowers go to seed, our cones last through the winter if not cut back. This creates a completely different look and mood in the garden.

Q So the dead stems are all part of it?

A Well, gardeners call them dead stems, dead heads – but these are the seeds, the new beginnings. It is all part of the cycle of a garden and each part has its place. The new perennial movement accentuates the rhythm. You could say it is more masculine.

Q Masculine or feminine, they are certainly more beautiful than pretty.

A The brushstrokes are bigger too. Large sweeps of plants and the flowers are mixed with textural tones – in America and Europe grasses are very popular.

Q I've been very inspired by many of these gardens and plantsmen but I'm aware how they have been influenced by their Northern European palettes. Can you see them working here in New Zealand?

A There is a shared cultural history with many of these plants, especially flowers. Flowers are important to gardeners and always will be as they motivate and engage, but they need to fit within the New Zealand context. And even within New Zealand you need to think about how the seasons are different from region to region.

Q We also have to consider how plants might populate our delicate ecosystems.

A Of course, of course. I am from Missouri, but I respect your landscape. In a garden context you should consider whether hardy actually means aggressive. No one wants plants in their garden that become unmanageable. It is a fine line and should always be a consideration, but if flowers can be mixed with natives that otherwise might be ignored I see that as an opportunity for your natives. Imagine a drift of myself, some *Phormium cookianum*, perhaps some *Corokia cotoneaster*, anamanthele and some green kniphofia... beautiful, seasonal, subtle.

Q That does appeal!

A But it must be soft and sweeping and bold. No dotty, side-by-side plantings: paint! Oh – and make sure you think about all the seasons. With the *Phormium cookianum*, its flowers are beautiful, but also its seed heads last and become crackly and black. Think of this when you paint.

Q I can see why all those greats like working with you.

A I know who I am. I'm not afraid to hold up my head, summer through winter and starting all over in the spring. Nor should you be!

Q I've always liked tall poppies.

A Yes, another plant you must never dead head, you understand well what I mean.

Q I've put away those secateurs. ❀



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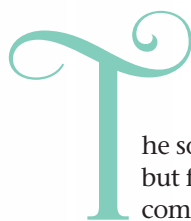
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IN SEASON

watersiders

Boggy, soggy spots can be a curse for many a gardener but if you work with the conditions, you can grow a sensational array of plants and create a wetland wonderland, says Neil Ross

The moisture that lawns so despise is lapped up by water-side plants which give you lush, luxuriant and fresh growth that steams on into autumn



he soggy bottom is a nightmare, not just for pastry cooks, but for lawn-lovers. Poorly draining soil can lead to compaction and die-off of that beloved green baize and then moss moves in, big time. But take a sideways look, and damp – that perennial problem in many a garden plot – can become an opportunity to roll back the lawn and introduce a raft of exciting plants that will grow nowhere else.

We may not all have a stretch of water that needs wrapping about with bog plants, but in even the most humble of gardens there is nothing to stop us reclaiming a ditch or soggy dip, or redirecting a gutter. When it rains, instead of emptying into a drain, the water will go to a scooped-out hollow to make the trendiest of wetlands: a rain garden, taking pressure off the stormwater system by keeping the H₂O where it landed.

In spring in such a place, you might show off with ribbons of bog primula and marsh marigolds, which can dissolve into clouds of pink astilbes and sheets of iris in early summer. It is around this time of year, however, when a damp border, rain garden or pond edge really comes into its own. The moisture that lawns so despise is lapped up by wetlanders, creating lush growth that steams on into autumn looking luxuriant and fresh to the end – even if you have to cheat and use a hose to maintain the effect in a dry year.

One of the characteristics of moisture-loving plants is the strong shape of their foliage. At the feet of all those iris javelins you simply have to add the exquisite contrast of fat dinnerplate leaves provided by the likes of ligularias, ajugas, hostas, rodgersias and *Darmera peltata*, a marvellous plant both for its spring flowers and autumn leaf colour. If you are planting the edge of a big pond you especially need these plants with strong leaves, which make their presence felt from a distance. That's why bold mats of fresh pickerel weed (*Pontederia cordata*) are so useful.

Pickerel weed

Pontederia cordata is named from the pickerel fish, which makes this dense marginal plant its home in its native haunts of the eastern Americas. The blue spikes of flowers last for several months in summer before producing edible seed (which is best roasted). The handsome leaves can be eaten too when young, but only where you know the water quality is good. Pickerel weed is tender and forms fast-spreading colonies that like to have their ankles permanently in water.



Ajuga reptans 'Catlins Giant'

I love this classic groundcover combo of two evergreen moisture-lovers: *Ajuga reptans* 'Catlins Giant' in a sea of *Lysimachia nummularia* 'Aurea'. The lysimachia is a thug, but a nice one, and is invaluable as a trailing plant for hanging baskets in shade. Plus put it on a damp bank and it will usefully knit the soil together as will the ajuga. From growersdirect.co.nz.



Colocasia elata 'Black Magic'

Taros are so perfectly sculptured they never look quite real. You can use them in bold drifts in a tropical garden, but I like to mingle them with apricot roses and native purple coprosmas just to ring the changes (proving that most of the fancy cultivars don't like their soil too boggy). *Colocasia elata* 'Black Magic' (pictured) is the darkest, or try *Colocasia esculenta* 'Illustris' with green veins and petrol blue leaves, and a lime-green form 'Maui Gold'. From Awa Nursery.

PHOTO: JENNY LILLY/GAP/PHOTONEWEZEALAND



Zephyranthes candida

A handful of bulbs usefully bend the rules and prefer damp spots in which to grow. Many flower in autumn such as colchicums, crinums and the ink and red flowers of schizostylis, but Peruvian swamp lily (*Zephyranthes candida*) is the most commonly grown. Beloved by landscapers because of its long flowering period, neat habit and evergreen leaves, it quickly makes carpets that are ideal for the edge of damp borders where there is good soil and plenty of sun. From Awa Nurseries.

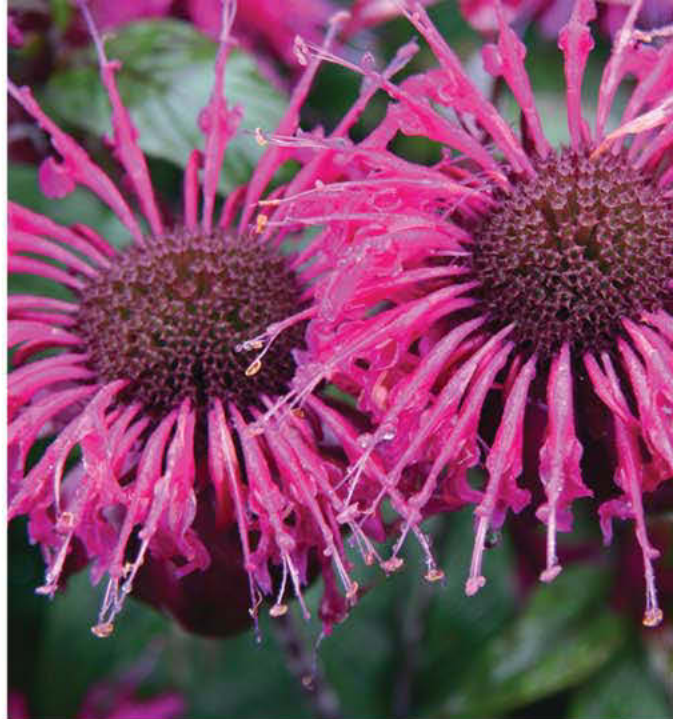


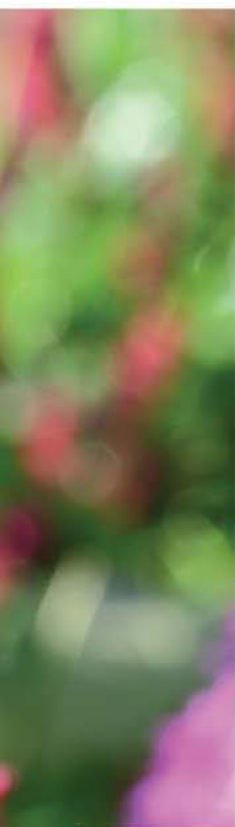
Astrantia major

Masterwort, also known as the pincushion flower on account of its unique structure, loves a heavy, damp soil and sun or part-shade. It needs a winter with frost to thrive but if it likes you the flowers last for months and are great for picking. If cut back, you sometimes get a second flowering. In Britain this is a top designer's flower and varieties come by the bucketful, from pinks to the blackest red. Here, though, it's hard to find just the classic white species. From smallfish.co.nz.

Monarda 'Raspberry Wine'

Bergamot is a traditional herb, but I grow it for its long succession of crazy crowns delivered on fast-spreading clumps about 40cm high. Choose new varieties like 'Gardenview Scarlet', 'Mahogany', 'Scorpion' and 'Prärienacht', give them a soil that's moist but not wet, and they will give lasting pleasure. The seedheads are almost as good as the summer show. From Marshwood Gardens.





Persicaria amplexicaulis

Seen here with *Geranium* 'Ann Folkard', it provides a wonderfully natural look without skimping on what we gardeners love: long-lasting colour. Close up those brick-red rats' tails don't impress, but swaying in a great sheet at a metre or more high they make a great backdrop for bold foliage plants such as taros, ligularia or rodgersia. Persicarias are problem-free and don't even need staking – they bulk up quickly and last for months in bloom. Watch out for the rarer white-flowered form.

So are taros paddling their ankles at the edge of the water. All of these will look good even before they flower. My favourite summer flowers have to be the persicarias purely for their ease of growth and longevity of display.

Those strong colours read well from a distance too – try the reds with similarly hot monardas and clouds of purple/mauve sweet Joe Pye weed (*Eupatorium purpureum*). But against these frothy flowers it pays to have some heftier blooms up your sleeve. The rose mallow (*Hibiscus moscheutos*) is an oddity but a lovely one. It's a water-loving hibiscus from America and was used to breed the massive-flowered 'Dixie Belle' varieties with blooms like satellite dishes, which are often used in bedding displays. The original plant has retained more elegance, with white blooms centred in maroon.

Plants in moist soils tend to go a bit mad which can be a nightmare to manage unless you have acres of heavy soil you want covering. Years ago we planted a single *Lysimachia ciliata* 'Firecracker' by a pond for its chocolate-coloured leaves but within three years this perennial had gobbled up metres of border with dense rhizomes. So out came the Roundup and in went some better-behaved lysimachias with room to spare for some other goodies.

Another late-summer thug, but a pretty one, is the obedient plant (*Physostegia virginiana*) – so-called because each flower is hinged on the spike and will swivel round and stay put if you push it with a finger. It is an attractive plant with tall 1m spikes of mauve flowers, but it runs madly and needs attending to with a sharp spade each year. A shorter white version is available. Even Louisiana irises, beautiful as they are, can be a nuisance when they form vast, weed-infested tracts, although I like the way *Lobelia siphilitica* seeds itself among these robust early performers and adds essential colour through summer. All sorts of colours are available from blues to pink/reds and maroons; I like them all mixed together among the iris leaves like a bag of sweets. Perhaps they do so well because they are from the same part of the world and just look relaxed and comfortable together.

Damp gardens can be difficult to orchestrate; growth is exponential and that's just the weeds even before you begin planting. Slugs and snails love the damp even more than the plants and while some specimens love to be submerged, others only want a slightly damp soil at certain times. The iris family

is typical; while the Louisiana types will happily paddle, their Siberian cousins like it high and dry. Those of a Japanese persuasion (*Iris ensata*) are total prima donnas demanding moist summers, dry soil in winter – and no doubt wine, flowers and their own private dressing room. Sometimes families are bound to squabble – it's all part of the game of gardening. 🍀



Lysimachia punctata 'Alexander'

This is the variegated-leaved form of an old favourite. I like it in spring, especially when the new shoots emerge in pink and cream and you can easily snap off the odd shoot that has reverted to the wild, aggressive green form. It spreads to a neat 40cm and likes a moist but not wet soil. The flowers are loved by bees and watch out for its equally good white flowered cousin *Lysimachia clethroides*, which needs a bit more room. From Marshwood Garden.

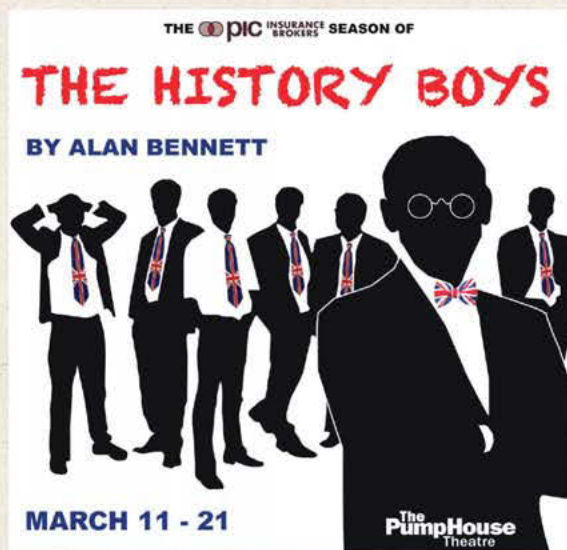


Ligularia veitchiana

Every garden should have a ligularia. If the king of the tribe is the tractor seat plant (*Ligularia reniformis*), then his queen has to be 'Britt-Marie Crawford'. They all like a rich, moist soil and protection from snails but in a cottage garden I prefer the older cultivars like *Ligularia dentata* 'Desdemona', where the purple bleeds like spilt wine from the back of the leaves, and *Ligularia veitchiana* with plain green paddles and the most impressive heads of daisies.

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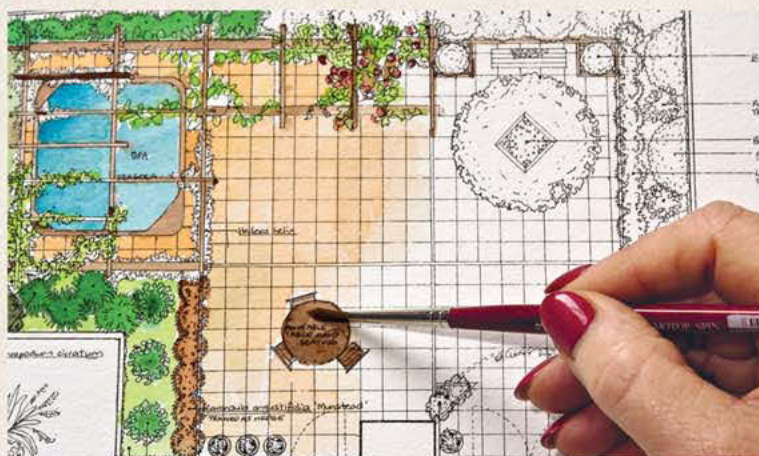
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Slow food

The delicious jelly-like pulp is translucent white or pinkish, with the texture and taste of grapes. It is sometimes made into wine in Brazil, although the fruit is more commonly eaten fresh, juiced or made into jam. If you don't use them quickly enough they will ferment, so perhaps wine is what happens if you're slow off the mark. Fruit are 3-4cm in diameter and the lustrous purple-black skin is tough and rather tart on the tongue.

Myrtles are a vast tribe of trees and shrubs. They include eucalyptus, the sprawling Australasian tea-tree family, pohutukawas, bottlebrushes, paperbarks, guavas including feijoa, and the huge monkey apple family (syzygium and eugenia), many of which are edible such as rose apple and cloves. Myrtles generally have fluffy, powder-puff flowers made up of clumps of stamens like pohutukawa blossom, mostly with no noticeable petals, and they have evolved to be pollinated by birds, bats and lizards rather than insects. They all produce copious amounts of nutritious, sugary nectar to attract them. The jaboticaba is a very typical myrtle with shiny small leaves that emerge as a coppery-apricot colour before turning green. They grow slowly, tolerating light frosts in winter.

The name comes from the Tupi people's word for turtle: jabotim. California Rare Fruit Council notes that the name literally translates as "like turtle fat", referring to the pulp of the fruit. I didn't want to know that.

Jaboticaba grow here in northern New Zealand despite their tropical origins but, even in the tropics, they can take between eight and 30 years to fruit. After 20 years jaboticaba trees may be little more than 2m high (the 27-year-old tree next door is 2m), which makes them a very compact fruit tree for a small garden or courtyard, but maddeningly slow for an impatient gardener like me. In the wild, apparently, the tree will flower and fruit only once or twice a year, even in the tropics, but keep the water up and it will respond by flowering more frequently, so fresh fruit can be picked year round. Here in Northland they fruit in summer and autumn, sometimes producing two or three crops per year. The handsome bark is mottled and streaked cream and tan, rather like the related guavas.

Jaboticaba is one of the strangest and most delectable of fruits. I am delighted to discover that at long last my first tree is fruiting 27 years after I planted it

Unfortunately, it is now in my neighbour's garden, which was once my home. In my present garden a 15-year-old specimen has grown well but has still not fruited. Jaboticaba, *Myrciaria cauliflora*, is a myrtle from Brazil and is the best known of the four jaboticaba species that are sometimes collectively called Brazilian grape trees, an enormously popular fruit throughout most of South America and a beautiful-looking tree that may reach 8m in old age. The fluffy little white flowers erupt directly from the bark of trunks and branches, producing ripe fruit similar to big black grapes within a few weeks.



The neighbour's jaboticaba tree in full bloom



The luscious fruit form directly on the branches

Given the time investment, if you want to plant one, plant three. It seems to me they fruit better if planted in groups so they can cross-pollinate each other. Jaboticaba thrives in partial shade or full sun and rich, well-drained soil. The fruit is full of powerful antioxidants with anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer

properties, and this aspect is creating interest among large-scale commercial orchardists in Brazil with an eye to the world health food market (until recently the fruit was mainly collected from wild trees or grown in backyards for home consumption). In New Zealand, jaboticaba trees are seldom available

in nurseries and are usually only grown from seed for obsessive collectors like me. I've never succeeded in getting cuttings to strike, although I'm told they can be grafted, which will speed up fruiting by many years. But for serious fruities, the fruit of the 'Like-Turtle-Fat' tree is well worth the wait. ✿

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Is there any crop in the edible garden more decorative than the chilli pepper? Right now my plants are hung with fruit in dazzling colours and a weird and wonderful array of shapes

I love chillies and peppers, and grow lots of different varieties. While they are all lovely to look at, the fruit on one plant can look so different from the fruit on another that it's hard to believe it's from the same family. This summer I have been trying to break the chilli Enigma code, and establish whether there is any logic to the variation in shapes and sizes – such as whether smaller chillies are always hotter, or purple chillies are always mild. So far I have not been able to ascertain any patterns at all. I suspect there's such a wide range of shapes and colours simply because people have been breeding the capsicum genus for so long and so have achieved all sorts of unlikely effects. Capsicums have been cultivated for more than 9000 years – they've been domesticated nearly as long as cats!

Pepper, chilli, paprika, capsicum: the names can be a little confusing.

And the botanical names are not much help. The genus of all peppers and chillies is *Capsicum*, and they're part of the Solanaceae or nightshade family. There are five domesticated species: *Annuum*, *Baccatum*, *Chinense*, *Frutescens* and *Pubescens*, with *Capsicum annuum* being the most common (there are 26 wild species too). *Annuum* in a plant name means annual, which is not technically correct as under ideal conditions chilli peppers are actually perennials. They are a long way from their hot-blooded homelands in New Zealand though, so you are best to treat them as half-hardy annuals here.

It is *Capsicum chinense* that includes most super-hot chilli cultivars.

That name's a bit of a misnomer as well – *chinense* in a plant name means from China, and this species originated in the Amazon. Being from a tropical country, they do well in areas of high humidity and thrive in my Auckland garden. They're much later to fruit though, a good month after *Capsicum annuum*.

It is possible to create your own new chilli varieties by hybridising.

Although you will need a steady hand and quite a lot of spare time! Unlike say, pumpkins, which produce male and female flowers on one plant, chilli flowers contain male and female parts and mainly pollinate themselves. That means, if left to their druthers, they are true to type, so seed will grow into a replica of the parent plant. But if you want to try your hand at hybridising, start with two varieties from within one species. (You can cross different species, but it's a bit harder.) Look for two that have marked differences in colour and shape, so you'll be able to see the difference between their progeny. Select a flower from the variety you are using as the male, and a closed flower from the other variety to use as the female. With tweezers, carefully remove the petals from the female parent flower and "emasculate" it, which involves picking the stamens off one by one, being careful not to damage the pistil in the middle. Once your flower is suitably emasculated, use a cotton bud to transfer pollen from the male parent flower. When that flower sets fruit, the seed will have chromosomes from the two different parents. That seed is what is known as F1, or first filial generation.

If you sow that seed next season, it will be something of an anticlimax.

The fruit will appear pretty much unchanged from the original mother plant! If you harvest that so-called F2 seed, however, you'll produce pods that look different. F2 seed is when you start to see different combinations of the genetic material from the mother and father. Theoretically, if you sowed a dozen F2 seeds, you could end up with 12 completely different plants. Select the ones with characteristics you like, and keep growing them for a few years. Once you get to F8 – that is, the eighth generation of seed – you have something likely to come true again. ❀



GLUT INSTINCT

The sight of a laden fruit tree is certainly gratifying, but the huge glut of fruit it produces can exceed one's eating capacity.

This can be a bit daunting, but over the years, I've worked out a few ways to deal with the glut. The first and most important rule is to plant the right varieties. Fruit tree label information can be confusing. One will say the variety ripens in April, another says autumn and the third will claim it to be late season. All of this also depends on your climate! But is worth asking local gardeners about what will be ripe when, where you live. Not only can you extend your season with early and late varieties, they each have their own characteristics. I have found my early varieties a struggle in the Waikato. They are not such prolific producers as the main-season ones and sometimes not as flavourful, but when you haven't eaten a fresh peach for nine months the first

'Orion' in November is delicious and there only being a dozen or so makes them even more precious. I once asked an old NZ Tree Crops Association member what his favourite fruit was and he replied: "The first one of the season." He is so right. So-called main season varieties are the ones that thrive for me here. Most of them are extremely easy-care trees that flourish and produce by the bucket-load. This is when the preserving is done and bagfuls are passed on to friends. Late varieties are the ones that store best as fresh fruit. A late-season apple such as 'Granny Smith' stores in my chiller for over six months, compared to the early-season ones which will look scungy after a few weeks. I don't even bother trying to store early- or mid-season fruit any more.

If you are looking to store a crop as fresh fruit, give it calcium.

It promotes strong cell structure, which means the fruit will store better. Withhold nitrogen fertilisers during the ripening phase and apply dolomite or lime for calcium instead. Most fruits will ripen after picking – the exceptions being cherries, figs, citrus, berries (except blueberries), persimmons, pineapples, grapes and olives. Tree-ripening improves flavour and nutrition, but if you are picking them for storage, pick on the green side of ripe. Any partially rotten or damaged fruit should be discarded immediately but contrarily, codlin moth damage doesn't seem to affect storage life.

I prefer storing fruit briefly and eating it as fresh as possible best.

But I have found that fruit stored out of sight is rarely consumed in our house so it is a daily job to check and replenish the fruit bowl. Too much left out goes bad, but if not conveniently displayed it is ignored!

Some fruits store better than others: apricots are the worst, then peaches and nectarines, with apples and pears being able to be stored for the longest – some varieties will stay fresh in a cool area with a regular exchange of air. Cool because temperature slows down the ripening process, so except for tropical and sub-tropical fruits, which prefer a cool room temperature, get it as cold as you can as quick as you can without freezing. I have my chiller set at 2-4°C: colder than the average kitchen fridge.

Moisture is the most important factor. The optimal range is 90-95% humidity; anything less causes the fruit to dehydrate and go wrinkly. Most fridges are very dry (about 30% humidity), hence the veg and fruit bins in your fridge which seal and prevent moisture loss. Commercial chillers can be adapted for a price but on a smaller scale the easiest solution is an ultrasonic wave anion atomiser – otherwise known as a garden mist maker or fogger, and available at your local garden centre for about \$30. (And when not misting your fruit, it reverts to a great garden feature.)

The ripening process uses oxygen and produces carbon dioxide, which leads to fermentation. Air-flow is one way to prevent CO₂ building up; another is having a bag of calcium oxide (CaO or quick lime) nearby, which will absorb the CO₂ until it is all transformed to calcium carbonate (CaCO₂).

The transformation process is complete (and usefulness as a CO₂ extractor is finished), when the weight is 1.36 times the original weight. It is now limestone and can be used to fertilise the garden.

Most of the fruits that ripen after picking require ethylene to ripen. That's why you put an apple in a paper bag with your fruit to ripen – the apple gives off ethylene – and why one bad apple, which gives off excessive ethylene, will over-ripen and rot the rest in the barrel.

Air exchange is the easiest way to remove ethylene from your storage area. Potassium permanganate, or Condy's crystals, absorbs ethylene and so slows the ripening process. A friend of mine built a cellar under his house. It was cool, damp, dim, with vermin-proof vents front and back to allow air-flow. Pretty much the ultimate space, really.

TIPS FOR STORING FRUIT

- **Fresh figs** are an extravagance all their own. You can stagger their ripening by securing a bag over an almost-ripe (plump but still hard) fruit. I use a sandwich-size zip-lock bag with the corners cut off for air-flow. This mini glasshouse keeps the birds away and ripens the fruit in two or three days. Pick and place the bag over the next fruit to ripen.
- **Mandarin** segments thrown in the deepfreeze make yummy iceblocks.
- **Plums** and cape gooseberries washed, left to drain and bagged into the freezer remain freeflow. Store until ready to use or thaw on a rainy day for sauce or jam.
- **Yellow plums** (I have 'Louisa') made into jam and labelled "Mock apricot jam" are twice as popular as "Plum jam" in our household – marketing!
- **Passionfruit** pulp can be scooped into an ice cube tray and frozen.
- **Plums**, prunes, currants, persimmons, figs, apples and pears can be dried and kept in sealed containers in the freezer or chiller for use in muesli and baking.
- **Dried persimmon** slices make a tasty snack that is more popular than the fresh fruit in our household.
- **Dipping apple** rings into salted water before dehydrating prevents browning.
- **Raspberries** frozen flat in a plastic bag can be broken into chunks, placed straight into the saucepan with sugar and/or chocolate for a sauce or topping.
- **Nashi**, the Asian pear, was bred specifically for its keeping qualities and stores fresh for months.

Many people will advise you to jam and pickle what you pick.

I know you've got a whole book of the NZ Gardener team's favourite preserving recipes along with this magazine! It's true preserving extends storage life for years. But the reality is there is only so much jam, pickle and preserves the family will eat. (We are still working through the plum sauce enthusiasm of three years ago – next time, 10 bottles max!)

And for me, the number of hours I want to spend over a hot stove in the middle of summer are strictly limited. I now have a few set recipes and a rough number of jars I make up each year – plus a few to swap with friends or give away, and that's it. The rest is dried, frozen, stored, given away or as last resort, fed to the pigs! ❀



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Joe Pye weed is
a handy source
of nectar.

Fly away home

March is when we become aware that the days are shortening and nights cooling, but autumn? Not yet in North Taranaki, where we drift ever so slowly from season to season.

But every year, the same pressure comes on around now – the plight of the monarch butterflies. March is the start of the critical period. We have monarchs on the wing 12 months of the year in our garden and to a large extent, that is because we take active steps to guard late-season caterpillars. These are the ones that become chrysalises and hatch out as conditions for them grow more difficult. Given the short life span of a monarch – usually only a month, I'm told – it's the late-season candidates that winter over and guarantee continuance next summer.

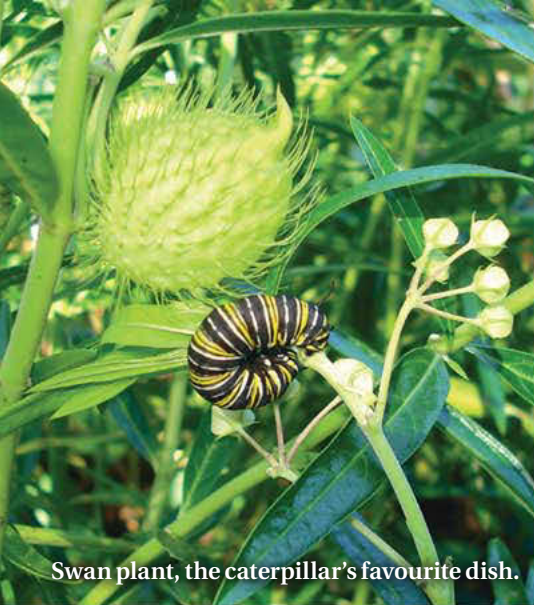
In North America monarchs migrate vast distances to over-winter in the mountains of Mexico.

But our monarchs seem not as determined and will stay at home. Occasionally we find a tree where many are clustered together and it is truly a small wonder in our world to see them stretching and flexing their wings in what little warmth there is on a sunny winter morning. More often, we will see raggedy specimens feeding from seasonal plants. The so-called *Edgeworthia papyrifera* (yellow daphne) can be an astounding sight in August.

The key to keeping our monarchs close to home is year-round food supplies, which means plenty of flowers with visible stamens and pollen which are a fair indicator of available nectar.

No doubt many readers are currently suffering the seasonal anxiety of stripped swan plants

and a surfeit of caterpillars at all stages of development. The caterpillars are very selective about food sources. Basically, they need swan plants. We always knew these as *Asclepias fruticosa*, but I see they have now been reclassified as *Gomphocarpus fruticosus* for the common one and *Gomphocarpus physocarpus* for the giant swan plant and I can't commit either of those names to memory. You can get medium and large caterpillars to chrysalis-size on slices of pumpkin, and we have done so in the past.



Swan plant, the caterpillar's favourite dish.



Admiral feeding from *Lycoris aurea*.

But you do have to confine them to do this because otherwise they will head off looking for their preferred food source given the opportunity. Is there anything as brave as the sight of a procession of monarch caterpillars heading away in search of more food?

Nowadays we try and reserve swan plants for late-season caterpillars.

This involves covering them with netting and taking steps to rid them of the nasty yellow aphid that decimate the plants. There is a specific aphid spray that does not harm caterpillars when infestations are really bad. Both Yates and Tui have organic products that target mites, whitefly and aphids. Later in the season, Mark starts his chrysalis rescue programme, carefully tying them with cotton to suspend them safely, because they rarely hatch successfully if lying on the ground.

We are finally getting patches of stinging nettle established here.

The only reason for this is to encourage the admirals, both red and yellow, to move into our garden. It is not our large native tree nettle – *Urtica ferox* – but one of the dwarf ones that has turned up in our garden but these butterflies will apparently feed on any of the nettle species, so we are allowing it to stay. Unlike the monarchs, which are self-introduced and were first recorded around 1840, our brand of red admirals are truly indigenous and not found anywhere else in the world. Because their host plant is not as obliging as the monarch's swan plant, they need all the help we can give them.

That said, there was a news item at the start of this year reporting that the US Fish and Wildlife Service is taking steps to protect the monarch butterfly in the United States under the Endangered Species Act. Loss of habitat and modern farming methods there have caused a massive drop in the monarch population and there are fears that, without intervention, they may die out.

Some utilitarians may ask what useful contribution butterflies make to human life. It is true that their direct contribution does not equal that of bees. But as gardeners, most of us set out to cultivate transient and ephemeral blooms for no other reason than that they are beautiful and bring delight. Butterflies are beauties of the insect world and their continued presence is a good indicator of a healthy ecosystem.

New Zealand has an active Monarch Butterfly Trust with a comprehensive website monarch.org.nz with information on bringing butterflies in to the garden and comprehensive lists of the various species' preferred host plants. While the obliging monarch is their main focus, the site has information on the whole range of butterflies found in New Zealand, which is not large by international standards, and they touch on the moths, which are considerably more numerous here... but perhaps less appealing to most people. ❀

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If you are a bee, you would have noticed a late start to spring and summer. The cold has put my hives back by an average of three weeks

What this means is that the hives have taken longer to build up bee numbers, and flowering trees and bushes have been later in producing flowers and hefty amounts of nectar and pollen. Luckily, now as summer ends, my bees have made up time. They've brought in large amounts of beautiful honey and have built many combs of beautiful wax to store it in.

Most beekeepers use embossed foundation sheets or plastic sheets that the bees build up and store their honey in. I prefer to keep my bees more naturally and let them build their own beautiful comb to their own unique dimensions. I choose to do this for two reasons. It allows the hive to raise as many drones or male bees as they wish: important as the drones spread the hive's genetic diversity.

Some beekeepers believe this also helps encourage hive contentment.

Let's face it: what bee wouldn't enjoy living in a harem surrounded by females for their entire life! Without drones there would be nobody to nag about leaving the toilet seat up or dropping clothes everywhere. The other reason is by letting the bees build comb from scratch, it avoids introducing any toxic chemicals into the hive. Unfortunately most wax from conventionally kept hives has a build-up of pesticides and miticides. Wax is a bit like a sponge; it soaks up any chemicals it comes in contact with and unfortunately these chemicals take years to break down. After several years of use, and re-use, wax can become a toxic graveyard for the bees and anyone who uses it.



Ingredients • 1 cup grated organic beeswax • 400ml organic coconut oil • 1 teaspoon frozen, crushed propolis (optional; but propolis has antibacterial, antifungal properties) • 10 drops of your favourite essential oil (I use rose geranium)

In a double boiler gently heat the coconut oil, wax and crushed propolis. When all the ingredients have melted and combined, take off the heat and stir well. Allow to cool slightly and then add essential oil. Pour into small silicone muffin trays and allow to cool overnight. In the morning remove from the moulds and enjoy.

New, clean wax is almost white in colour.

The bees produce flakes of wax from a gland in their stomach. They mould it with their mandibles and build the hexagonal-shaped cells with perfect measurements every time.

After I have harvested my honey I am left with a gooey mess of crushed wax and remnants of honey.

This clean and organic wax is nearly as valuable as the beautiful honey. To clean the wax I wash the sticky stuff in lukewarm water, then put the unprocessed wax in my simple solar melter. It takes only a few hours on a sunny day for the wax to melt and drain through a mesh filter, ending up as a block of wonderful, clean, chemical-free wax. I make use of this wonderful resource in a number of ways, including candles, lotions, furniture waxes and moisturising blocks.

At this time of the year, after a hot, dry summer and a season of gardening in jandals, my heels have cracks to rival the Grand Canyon. I make these great little lotion bars that I use to rub on my heels and elbows whenever my feet are looking mildly clean. If you can find a source of good beeswax, do try it yourself! ❀



Seedling single flowered dahlias add their charms to the bright colours of the summer border, the display continuing for several months. Monarch butterflies are attracted to the nectar-rich flowers.

Colour my world



Canna 'Black Magic'



Orange geranium



Musa velutina

Bananas don't have to be huge plants with leaves that spread far and wide. Some are compact and elegant, like *Musa velutina*

This has provided a good deal of pleasure over the summer here. I like the way bananas give you such a surprise with their flowering – one minute they seem to be growing only foliage, then suddenly there's a fat bud followed soon after by the flowers and fruit. *Musa velutina* played this trick on us, the gorgeous, deep-pink, fat bud ("The colour of my Dad's new kitchen!" exclaimed one young visitor) taking us by surprise, the pink flowers and tiny pink bananas following just days later.

***Musa velutina*, as you will have guessed, is a banana for looking at.** Not, alas, for eating. It will grow in sun or light shade. Our plant gets half-day sun in summer, not much at all in winter, and is in a relatively wind-sheltered spot. It grows around 2m in shade, possibly less in sun. Its ability to tolerate a bit of shade means it can be given some frost protection but, while one of the hardier bananas, it's still definitely a plant for areas with mild winters.

To overcome mutterings about that being all very well in our benign climate, let's consider another small-growing banana that's even more exotic looking yet is very cold-hardy. *Musella lasiocarpa*, sometimes called lotus banana, grows to just 1m high and has large, spectacular, golden-yellow flowers that last a long time. As with all bananas, plenty of food and water will be much appreciated.

The colour orange can be a controversial one in the plant world. But it can also be one of the most uplifting of flower colours. Attention-grabbing too, as I found when walking past Thorndon Green Gardens in Wellington. At the entrance to this mecca for plant connoisseurs, my attention was grabbed by several bright orange geraniums I could immediately envisage in clay pots on my sun-baked deck.

Apparently the big demand is for red geraniums, especially at Christmas. Driving home I noticed a local restaurant had a planting of dark red geraniums and colour-matched bedding begonias in an entrance planter. The colours merged into the shadowy background whereas if they'd dared to go with orange they would have had a head-turning effect.

Cannas are superb plants for vibrant summer colour. Here on the Kapiti Coast we have a little specialist canna nursery on the main road – just to the north of town, look for the sign on the left – which has a huge range of now hard to come by varieties. I bought a stunning deep orange-red variety this summer, 'Picador', which is one of the low-growing ones, with bright green foliage. Another low grower is 'Black Magic' with dark, velvet-red flowers, an excellent canna for the front of a border and for small gardens, but if you want a huge, dramatic, rich red then 'America' is a standout.

Lately I've grown *Canna* 'Tropicanna Black' where there's sun for only a few hours and have been amazed at how strong the colour is in the lower light – truly a near-black and most dramatic, especially where it combines with that almost year-round flowering, dark-leaved, orange-red *Fuchsia* 'Gartenmeister Bonstedt'.

One of the summer tasks I attend to religiously is the deadheading of the single-flowered dahlias.

The constant removal of the old flowers ensures all the energy of the plants goes into new flowering rather than slowing to produce seed. But there comes a time late in summer when I let some of the pods develop and ensure they don't get cut off until they have ripened and dispersed the seed. Provided you have some good varieties to start with – in my case the New Zealand-bred Hammett varieties – the results can be amazing. Of course some of the seedlings aren't worthwhile, and should be discarded. The good ones have often been taller-growing and have included a nice creamy-white and a very large light orange with widely spaced petals which looks stunning growing up among the burgundy foliage of *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy' and the golden trumpets of *Brugmansia* 'Butterscotch'. Some deep reds have occurred too, the best of which induce sounds of rapture where they intertwine with dark foliage cannas. ❀

• *Musa velutina* and *Musella lasiocarpa* are both available to purchase from subtropical specialist nursery Russell Fransham Subtropicals.



PURPLE PATCH

It is late summer and the damson tree is ripe again with another bumper crop. The poor little tree outdoes itself each year, branches smothered in small, tart purple plums



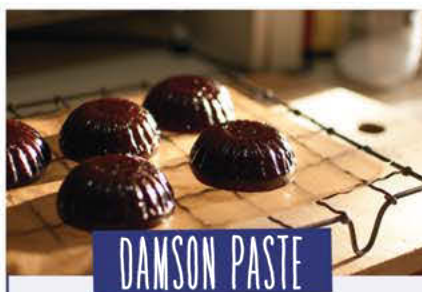


Delicious damson gin

This year I've stuck to my promise not to freeze any (more) damsons and instead I've made damson wine, which has to be fermented; damson gin (just pin-pricked damsons, gin and sugar); and damson paste aka damson cheese. Damsons are a self-fertile European plum variety that ripens late in summer. They are quite vigorous-growing upright trees that will reach 5m in height and will send out suckers if not grafted onto a root stock. Most damson trees that you buy will be grafted these days, so that shouldn't be a problem, but if you visit an old derelict orchard you will often find ungrafted damson trees with suckers that have formed dense thickets of trunks.

In our experience, the trees require little care and pruning. Even the birds don't seem to bother with the fruit like they do some other plums. This is probably because the fruit is small and has a sweet/sharp flavour that lends itself to cooking, rather than eating fresh, and also because it's difficult to tell when they are ripe. When ripe they soften slightly and lose some of their white bloom to become a shiny purple colour.

Eaten fresh, damsons are very tart. But they have still long been used in culinary creations. In Victorian England it was the damson, not the quince, that was preferred for making fruit cheeses. Large discs of damson cheese would be served whole as a sweet course, studded with slivered almonds and drenched in port. They would also be matured like a good cheese and kept for several years. The high sugar content and low moisture act



DAMSON PASTE

If you can't be bothered stirring for all eternity then this is the fruit paste recipe for you. It is based on a recipe from Wellington food writer Lois Daish and she gives the fantastic tip of boiling it in a heavy-bottomed, wide, deep-sided frying pan. Increasing the surface area greatly reduces the arm-numbing stirring that we usually associate with making fruit paste – try it and you'll be convinced. This recipe works equally brilliantly with quince.

Cook 500g of damsons with 1 cup of cider and 5 cloves in a large stainless-steel pot until very soft and a little reduced. Push the pulp through a sieve to remove the stones. Weigh the pulp and put it in a heavy-bottomed, high-sided frying pan. Add half the weight in sugar (approximately 250g) and bring to the boil, stirring frequently. It will be ready when you can draw a wooden spoon across the pan and the line won't join up. This can take up to 30 minutes. Pour it into moulds that have been lightly greased with a mild-flavoured cooking oil such as rice bran or grape seed oil. Smooth the surface and let it set. Turn it out when cold and wrap in greaseproof paper. Store in a container on a cool shelf.

as a preservative and I have successfully stored discs of damson cheese, made using the above recipe, for more than a year, wrapped in waxed paper, in a container on a cool shelf.

If you have a mature damson tree it won't be long before you start looking for recipes. Our six-year-old tree produces more than 30kg of fruit; that's a lot of jam and sauce! A disc of damson paste is brilliant to have on hand for swishing up cheese and crackers. I pour it into shallow muffin pans to set so I get lovely little discs of paste. So posh. ❀

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Petal preserves

Most roses are going into their dormant phase by now, but there's still time to gather some of their delicate blooms and try out some simple recipes

I like March. It's the month when we have time to catch our breath after all the froth and bubble of summer. It's been lovely – I can't remember when the roses in Akaroa bloomed their hearts out with such generous style and grace. A season to talk about in leaner years, perhaps, but the party isn't over quite yet. The musicians are still playing but some of the more flamboyant guests have gone and the mood is quieter. The roses know it and so do we. Although some strong repeat-flowering roses will flower on into winter, for most roses it is time to stop deadheading and feeding as they go gently into natural dormancy.

"Oh, this is the joy of the rose; that it blows, and goes," wrote Willa Cather. If we have time to gather those petals before they disappear, we can use them in a variety of ways, as herbalists have done through the ages. Nasturtiums in the salad and borage flowers in the gin are positively ho-hum compared to the things you can do with rose petals.

I've collected recipes from friends and old books over the years and have bravely tried some of them.

When I look at the recipes now, some have a cross through them, which means they were failures. Rose honey, for instance, because it was so messy to make, and rose petal sandwiches, said to be Queen Victoria's favourite afternoon tea – but without a cook to prepare them and a butler to deliver them on a silver tray, who would bother?

Rose oil however is easy to make.

My recipe was given to me in Kashmir many years ago. You don't need to wash the petals but make sure they haven't been sprayed. Pour two cups (500ml) of olive oil into a wide-necked glass jar and add as many fragrant rose petals as possible, pressing them down in the oil. Leave in the sun – a window sill is fine – for six days then strain, pressing the oil out of the petals.

Repeat the process several times using fresh petals until the oil smells strongly of roses, then store it in airtight bottles. It can be used sparingly to perfume potpourri, to flavour fruit salads, as a bath oil, and on the skin although it won't be up to cosmetic standards. I've rubbed mine on tired gardener's feet.

A rose conserve is said to be very good for you. There is a line in a very old book (*Treasures and Hidden Secrets*, London 1637) saying that it "comforteth the stomach, the heart and the bowels, it mollifieth and softeneth, and it is good against black cholera and melancholy." All probably true enough, except for the black cholera. If we plan on eating the rose petals, they should be well-washed. Rose petal jams don't set well without help but I have an old recipe for a nice chunky conserve that might do wonders for us... if three cups of sugar doesn't kill us. I tell myself it all boils away.

If you enjoy herbal teas, you might like to try Queen Henrietta Maria's rose tea. Put half a cup of dark rose petals in two cups of boiling water and simmer very slowly for 10 minutes. Strain and add honey to taste. The queen preferred it when cool. To be honest, I have never bothered to make it.

Last month I grieved for a tame dead blackbird. I wondered if the bird had been poisoned. Could the culprit have been poisonous laburnum seeds? My laburnum tree has had the chop, but would a bird eat poisonous seeds when there is plenty of other food around?

The roses pictured on the right have been the best performing for me this season. But there are two I will single out for special praise. 'Radway Sunrise' has been magnificent, although the hue takes a bit of getting used to – I'm not sure if it knows what colour it should be, but it's trying out a few. 'Rosy Mantle', the progeny of the well-loved 'New Dawn', is pink perfection in graceful clusters of elegant Hybrid Tea-shaped blooms. Not many roses manage an unfading pink without a trace of lolly or salmon.

But queen of the garden is the rose 'NZ Gardener'. Editor Jo gave me it for Christmas. It's an exceptionally lovely floribunda bred last year by Bob Matthews to celebrate the magazine's 70th birthday. She arrived raring to go and, once planted, has never stopped blooming and growing. Big, cupped flowers full of crinkly petals are a lovely, luminous mix of dusky pink and peach. Perhaps Bob's best yet? ❀

ROSY RECIPES

ROSE PETAL CONSERVE.

Ingredients • 4 cups of rose petals (dark colours are best) • 3 cups sugar • 3 cups water • 2 tablespoons lemon juice

Remove the pale heels at the base of the petals, then layer them in a bowl with sugar between each layer. Cover and leave overnight. Put petals, sugar, water and lemon juice in a saucepan and bring to the boil gently. Simmer till setting point. (It won't set hard so you may prefer to add setting mix.) Pour into hot jars and seal. Delicious with whipped cream on scones or pikelets.

BETTY SNELL'S ROSE & RHUBARB SYRUP

Betty Snell of Southland Heritage Roses is famous for her rosy delights. This is easy, quick to make and lifts a plain icecream dessert to something out of the ordinary.

Ingredients • 1 cup of fragrant dark rose petals • approx 500g rhubarb • 2 cups water • 1.5 cups sugar

Slice rhubarb and simmer until pulped.

Strain, pour liquid back into saucepan, add sugar, rose petals (white heels removed) and stir well. Bring to boil, simmer 15 minutes, then strain. Bring syrup back to boil until deep red. Pour into warmed jars and seal.

ROSE HIP AND APPLE JELLY

It's a bit early for rose hips, which need a frost to soften them for rose hip jelly. But frosts can come early down here and the following simple country preserve which uses apples is worth keeping in mind.

Ingredients • 500g rose hips • 500g cooking apples, peeled and sliced • 400g sugar • Juice of one lemon

Put the hips in a pan with 850ml water. Bring to the boil and simmer 45 minutes, squashing the hips against the pan with a wooden spoon. Pour into a jelly bag and leave overnight to strain. Next day, cook the apples in 300ml water until soft. Add the strained rose hip juice and sugar, and cook over low heat, stirring to make sure all the sugar is dissolved. Stir in the lemon juice and boil rapidly for 15 minutes until jam is ready to set. Pour into warm jars.



'Rosa de l'Hay'



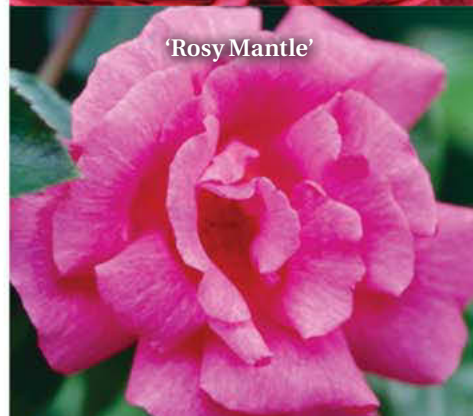
'Hansa'



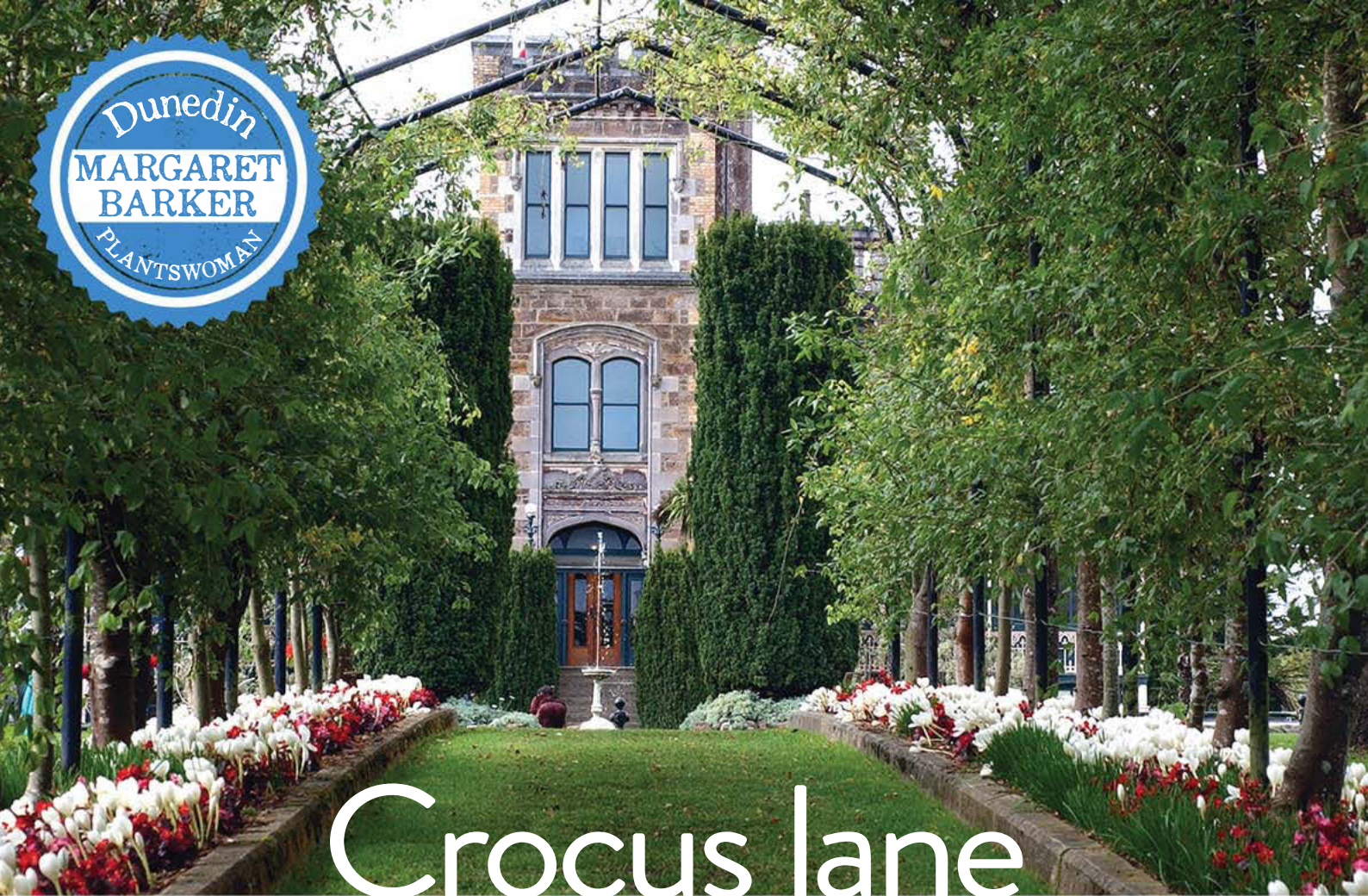
'Gertrude Jekyll'



'Reine des Violettes'



'Rosy Mantle'



Crocus lane

Day are shorter. Lawns are freshening; with the heat of summer now past, there's more moisture in the soil. An autumn event! Just when most flowers are going over, crisp colchicums emerge

Colchicum! What a mouthful of a botanical name. Their common names have their own problems. Autumn crocus is confusing; there are real crocuses that flower in autumn. Naked lady is also used for the belladonna lily. Colchicum flowers do resemble crocus, but are larger, more sumptuous. Most colchicum flowers emerge from the earth with no leaves too. They do have leaves; how else would they survive? They're just not into multitasking. The large and somewhat coarse leaves come and go in spring.

In our temperate climate we plant the bulbs four inches deep in any reasonable soil. They are not plants that like to bake in summer. We must have 1000 colchicums in the garden at Larnach Castle,

all descended from a dozen or so bulbs purchased 35 years ago. Under the azaleas, with autumn foliage turned burgundy, are sheets of lavender; flowers of *Colchicum speciosum* 'The Giant'. Too many bulbs in fact, pushing each other out of the ground. There's never enough time to thin them.

In March elegant pure-white flowers, like porcelain goblets, of *Colchicum speciosum* 'Album' emerge. They grow through the pink and red bedding begonias planted under the 20-metre-long laburnum pergola. A formal planting. There's an informal planting in The Field, an area that used to be a car park until we decided to beautify. It was jolly hard work planting colchicums in the compacted ground which was then sowed in grass. Grass is mowed in summer, after the bulb leaves

have died down. With autumn rains, the grass becomes like green velvet, which sets off the randomly planted, naked pure-white colchicum flowers.

Not as spectacular, *Colchicum agrippinum* is still a dainty favourite.

It's smaller, with flowers checked lavender and white. This plant is thought to be a hybrid; its origin unknown. European meadow saffron, *Colchicum autumnale*, is pretty too but preferably seek out *Colchicum speciosum*, its more substantial cousin. The meadow saffron was already in the castle garden. As we cleared and restored the overgrown garden, bit by bit, I kept chucking these bulbs into the areas yet to be tackled. Those b****y bulbs with their b****y great leaves come up every year. For 40 years they have been reminding me that I should have done the job properly in the first place and got rid of them. The many petalled flowers of voluptuous double lavender *Colchicum* 'Waterlily' are gorgeous. Alas, it is slow to multiply. I have it in the serpentine walk at the castle. It is growing through a low geranium so its heavy blooms are supported by surrounding plants.

If colchicums have a drawback, it's those great big leaves that die down unattractively in early summer.

We found that the leaves shaded and killed the mown grass in the laburnum pergola. Now we grab the leaves and shove them back and under other things. In the field the colchicum leaves actually look lush and attractive as they emerge in spring in the broad sweeps of plantings. In this casual part of the garden the grass is allowed to grow tall, largely disguising the leaves as they die until the midsummer mow. But when colchicums are growing through other plants the yellowing leaves flop on top of them. These leaves are feeding the bulbs for the next season's display and their removal will weaken and maybe eventually kill the plant. You have to bear with this unsightly mess, until the leaves naturally die off.

Colchicums are said to have medicinal properties. They contain the alkaloid colchicine, which is used pharmaceutically to treat gout. But don't try to treat yourself. Colchicine has the same properties as arsenic with no known antidote, so you might come to an untimely and painful end. ❀



Colchicum speciosum 'Album'



Colchicum speciosum 'The Giant'



Colchicum 'Waterlily'



Colchicum agrippinum

Lynn River

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Premium
Quality



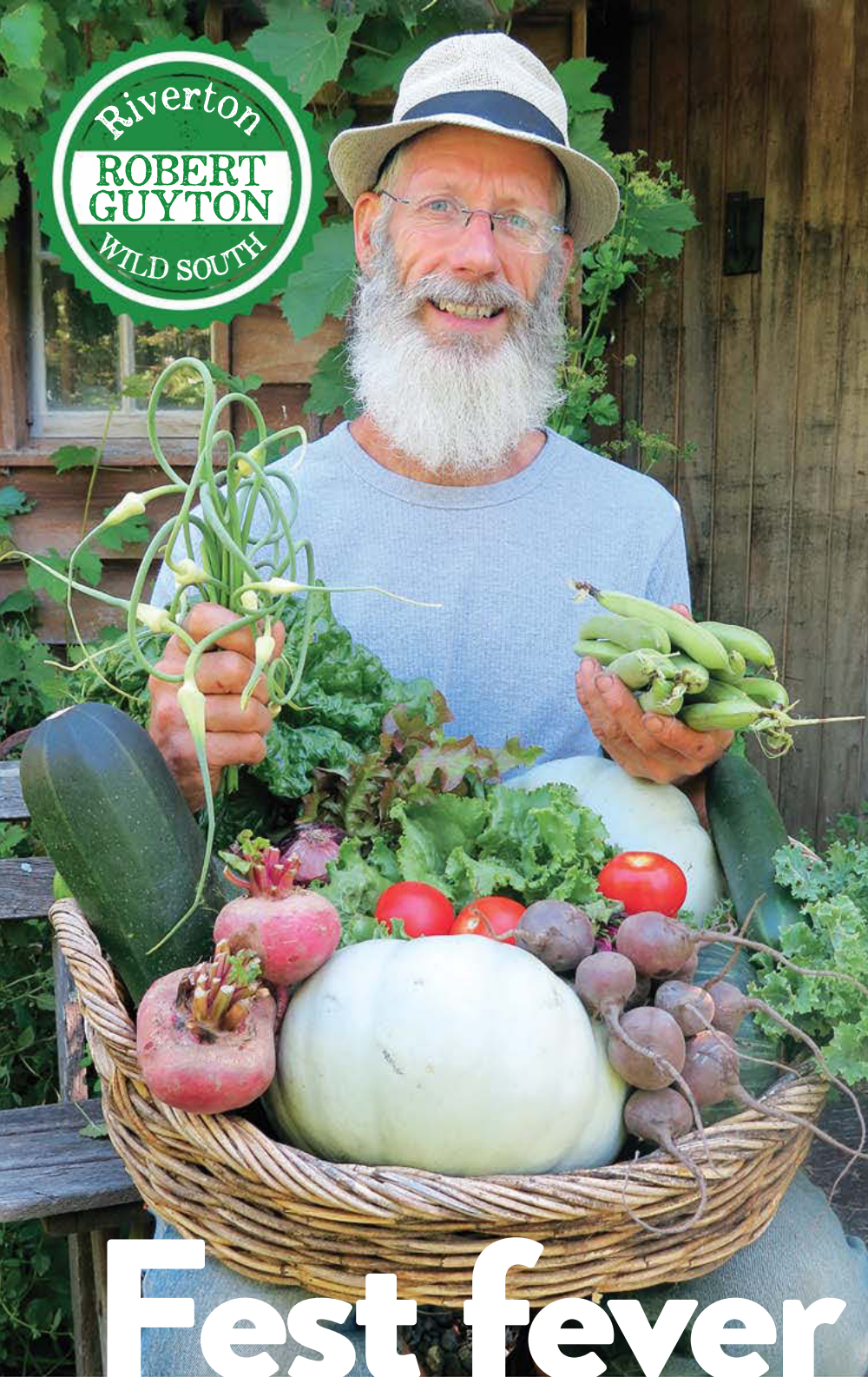
Comfortable



Durable



Machine
Washable



I expect she will swoon at the warmth of we southern gardeners and wish she lived here year-round, but sadly, she'll have to prove her worth before we consider the full invitation to stay here permanently.

We've another writer: Stephen Barstow, author of *Around the World in 80 Plants*, who will be describing his passion for the edible perennial plants, yes, 80 of them, that he has discovered during his world travels. And Mark Christensen, finder of the super-apple 'Monty's Surprise' and heritage vegetable researcher, will be on hand to tell his story of discovery. Bill Blair, trug-maker from Oamaru, will demonstrate his craft, as will a hurdle-maker, beekeeper, urban-hen wrangler, willow-basket weaver, cheesemakers... the list of enthusiastic, home-spun, appropriate technologists is a long one. There will be workshops, performances, cake, plants and produce for sale, tables groaning under the weight of Southland-grown fruit and vegetables. Do I sound breathless with excitement? Wait until you see me on the day, I'm a spinning top. Fortunately, the capable team of festival organisers keep cool heads and everything runs as smoothly as the waters of the estuary at Riverton's back door. I'll be leading tours through my own forest garden and will endeavour not to lose people in what my neighbour once described as our "mess of pottage". My thistle-down white beard will serve as a beacon for the disorientated.

A popular attraction is the cider-press, owned and operated by our patron, Malcolm McKenzie.

He imported the beautiful beast from Texas, and it has hardly spent an idle day since, squeezing juice from heritage apple varieties, much of which is transmuted by mysterious means into invigorating cider to keep us warm during the winter. The festival runs over March 28 and 29, opening at 10am and closing at 4pm both days. Saturday night is not one for resting though; the Heritage Harvest Feast has always been an evening of much frivolity, featuring the Champion of the Harvest competition, where harvesters of all levels of skill vie for a beautifully crafted wooden apple trophy. People travel from far-flung places for the festival and there's no reason why you shouldn't be one of those wise folk; we're lovely down here.

Fest fever

When your garden's produced a harvest that's plentiful, the best thing you can do is celebrate! That's what we'll be doing this month

March is harvest month and Riverton's Heritage Harvest festival will give us a chance to say "Thanks, garden" and take a peek at what other people managed to entice out of the soil in their gardens and orchards.

The Riverton Heritage Harvest festival has been a regular feature on Southland's calendar for seven years, and this year we have a bushel of special guests, including *NZ Gardener's* own editor, Jo McCarroll.

Do bring a prize persimmon or an especially splendid vegetable to boast about. We're always keen to see what folk from across the border can produce. For details on the festival, visit sces.org.nz.

March is traditionally the month when main potatoes are lifted.

Given the long, grey, soggy spring the south was subject to this year, many gardeners will have left the sowing of their potatoes till later. But for those who kept to the calendar and planted as usual, now is the time to lift those spuds. If there are still growing tops among the crop, dig them up anyway. It's not vital that all growth has ceased before harvesting. If you've grown a variety that stores well, leave some soil on the skins as scrubbing them clean at this stage can break the surface and reduce their storability considerably. The ground left behind once the potato crop has been forked-up and taken away can be fertilised and worked ready for the sowing of whatever you wish to follow with. Brassicas enjoy establishing in soil that has previously grown potatoes and the process of digging the tubers up should create easy conditions for planting.

Onions, too, are harvested now, providing the weather is dry.

It's important to dehydrate the stems of onions before storing them by whatever method you prefer, as a wet stalk, even a slightly moist one, will spell fungal doom. Lift them on a dry day and leave them to further dry on the ground, or on a framed mesh of some sort where the warm, dry air can circulate and draw out any residual moisture. Or, once you've determined that your onions are ready to leave the ground – that is, their leaves are browned and dried – you could “string them up in bunches”, as the old books recommend. This provides an opportunity for creativity with the method and style you want to use, especially if your onions are to hang in the kitchen or pantry, looking pretty. I plait mine around a length of twine of the sort that, in the days when men were men, used to bind hay bales. The onions, plaited and looking very Mediterranean, hang from the branch of a tree that grows nearby to the onion patch, for a day or two, if the weather's kind, so they can really get the breeze through 'em.



Plant out your spring bulbs now; some of them, anyway.

Fritillaria go in now, if you are lucky enough to have any bulbs of these beauties. I love them, but find they don't thrive in my wild garden, instead getting overwhelmed by the multitude of neighbours. Fritillaria enjoy space to look beautiful in, especially the more delicate members of the family. I might try crown imperials next; their extra height and robustness might give them the edge they need here in every-flower-for-itself country. Other bulbs to plant now include grape hyacinths and freesias, both delightful grandmother's garden flowers, and the gorgeous iris, which likes to have some part at least of its rhizome left exposed to the sunlight. At least, the irises I grow do, those being the roughest of the lot, the yellow flags. My only disappointment with the wet-ground-loving *Iris pseudacorus* is that the blooms are so short-lived, especially when transferred to a vase. They're best left in situ and viewed daily. They like compost and while they are bog-dwellers by nature, they'll grow in dry conditions too.

Celery benefits from attention now too, in the form of watering.

It's a thirsty beast, is *Apium graveolens*, and will suck up every drop of water you provide, to its and your benefit. Dry celery is no treat in March, bitter and stringy, but juicy stalks of well-watered celery, green and crunchy, are an autumn treat. Celery enjoys a bit of body in its drink, so make every second dousing a kelp smoothie or perhaps a comfrey tea.

Celery enjoys a bit of body in its drink, so make every second dousing a kelp smoothie or a comfrey tea

Your caulis should be hearty and hale at this time of the year.

Watering and feeding them now will give extra body and I assume, more value to the eater when eaten. Feed them with liquid manures of the sort you most enjoy applying. Fold up some of the outside leaves to shade the “curd” (the creamy-white destined-for-the-pot head) from the sun and you'll produce a prize vegetable.

Prune your rambling roses – if you can reach them, that is.

I found one that had grown right to the canopy of my native tree corner, quite unnoticed, and was looking as healthy as any rose I've ever seen. I pruned it and kept the cane for boasting about, after de-thorning it and dipping its cut ends in bees wax to slow the wrinkling process. New shoots have come away from the base, I've noticed, and this is what will happen for you if you prune away old growth this month. If you have a supply of old stable litter – that is, horse apples and straw – apply it to the root zone and by golly, your rose will ramble in the coming growth season. Beautiful, fragrant and delicate they may be, but roses sure do love poo. ❀



An aged totara gate breaks up a perennial border walk at The Paddocks in Warkworth.

A gardener's road trip to Matakana

This month Barbara Smith explores the horticultural hotspots, fine foods, antiques and art trails of this region just north of Auckland

Build it and they will come should be the mantra for Matakana. This was the first place in New Zealand to become a Slow Town, promoting local products, sustainably grown for a better way of life. A community of vinters, growers, craftspeople and artists has gradually converged in the countryside around Matakana Village. There's been a northern drift of gardeners too. Matakana, just an hour's drive from Auckland, has become a new hub for nurserymen, plantspeople and generally crafty old codgers. One of the gardeners who drifted north was my mother Margaret – she now lives in Warkworth – so she and I decided to explore some local horticultural gems in more detail.

1 POP IN ON A PERENNIAL BORDER HEAVEN AT THE PADDOCKS

After 30 years tending the gardens at Ayrles, Penny and Rowan Wiggins moved north to create their own 0.8ha country garden. Assessed as a Garden of Significance by NZ Gardens Trust, The Paddocks is chock-full of roses and the sorts of perennials that no longer appear in garden centres – Penny grows hers from seed (kingsseeds.co.nz). The roses and foxgloves peak in spring, but there is plenty of autumn colour from rarely seen rudbeckias, cranesbill geraniums, Keith Hammett dahlias and sea holly (*Eryngium maritimum*). There's a thriving potager, an orchard and an olive grove too. Totara posts recycled from the local A&P showgrounds have been repurposed by Rowan as fences and gates. Open October to April, by appointment only. Phone 09 425 7651.

2 PICK A PROTEA AND WALK THE SCULPTURAL HABITAT TRAIL

The Protea Patch, at 545 Matakana Road, is a cut flower and retail protea nursery. Owners Tony White and Wendy Marshall had a dream to create a spiritual habitat with large-scale sculptures made from natural materials. A violent storm in 2007 provided the wherewithal. Grand old trees have been turned into sculpture and rings of cut logs form intricate patterns. For opening hours and a plant catalogue visit proteapatch.co.nz.



A violent storm in 2007 provided Tony White and Wendy Marshall

with the raw materials for a large-scale natural sculpture trail



Storm-damaged trees became garden art at Sculptural Habitat; Margaret and I have a coffee at the Morris and James café; The Glass House appears to float over the water lily-filled lake at Brick Bay Wines.

3 TAKE A TOUR OF THE POTTERY WORKSHOP AT MORRIS & JAMES

As well as the showroom, which is full of pots, wall art and sculptural pieces, there's a free daily tour of the workshop at 11.30am (for groups of 12 or more please book by phoning 09 422 7116). Each piece is individually hand-crafted from local clay and decorated with a distinctive palette of colourful glazes. Pick up a piece during the Harvest Sale, which opens during Taste Matakana (May 16, 12-5pm) and runs until June 1. The Pottery Cafe is fully licensed and serves breakfast, coffee, cakes and lunch in the courtyard by the showroom. Check the website (morrisandjames.co.nz) for seasonal opening hours.

4 SHOP FOR A PICNIC LUNCH AT THE MATAKANA FARMERS MARKET

The best of local produce is on sale at the market in Matakana Village, 8am-1pm every Saturday. Don't miss the Matakana Oil Co-operative tasting table, Whangateau Roses bouquets, and plants from Organic Herbs & Seedlings.

5 REFUEL AND RESTOCK AT MATAKANA COUNTRY PARK

This child-friendly complex is home to a animal petting park, restaurant, bar, cafe, gallery, craft shop and seasonal events. Look out for Ron Green's trees, shrubs and perennials at the Market Days held every Saturday 9am-2pm. Details at matakanacountrypark.co.nz.



6 VISIT OMAIO, A GARDEN OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

Liz Morrow, foundation trustee of the NZ Gardens Trust, has created a 7.5 hectare garden in a bush setting with views towards Kawau Island. Sculptures and underplanting of clivia, hydrangeas and hostas add colour and interest year-round. Open by appointment. Book at omaio.co.nz.

7 LOUNGE BY THE LAKE AT BRICK BAY WITH A MEAL OR GLASS OF WINE

The Glass House is cantilevered over the lake, and perfectly positioned for views of activity in the vineyard. It's also the gateway to a Sculpture Trail that winds through the natural landscape around the lake via boardwalks. Displays change regularly as the pieces are sold. Wear walking shoes or gumboots. For opening times, menus and wine sales visit brickbay.co.nz.

8 SEE WHAT THE LOCAL ARTISTS ARE UP TO AT THE VIVIAN GALLERY

There are regularly changing shows of fine art in this purpose-built gallery designed by Mike Petre. Set in three acres of bush and pasture, where outdoor works are shown, the gallery features the work of local and national professional artists. Open seven days from 11am-5pm. View the exhibition schedule and artists' profiles at thevivian.co.nz.

9 PAMPER YOURSELF AT MATAKANA BOTANICALS

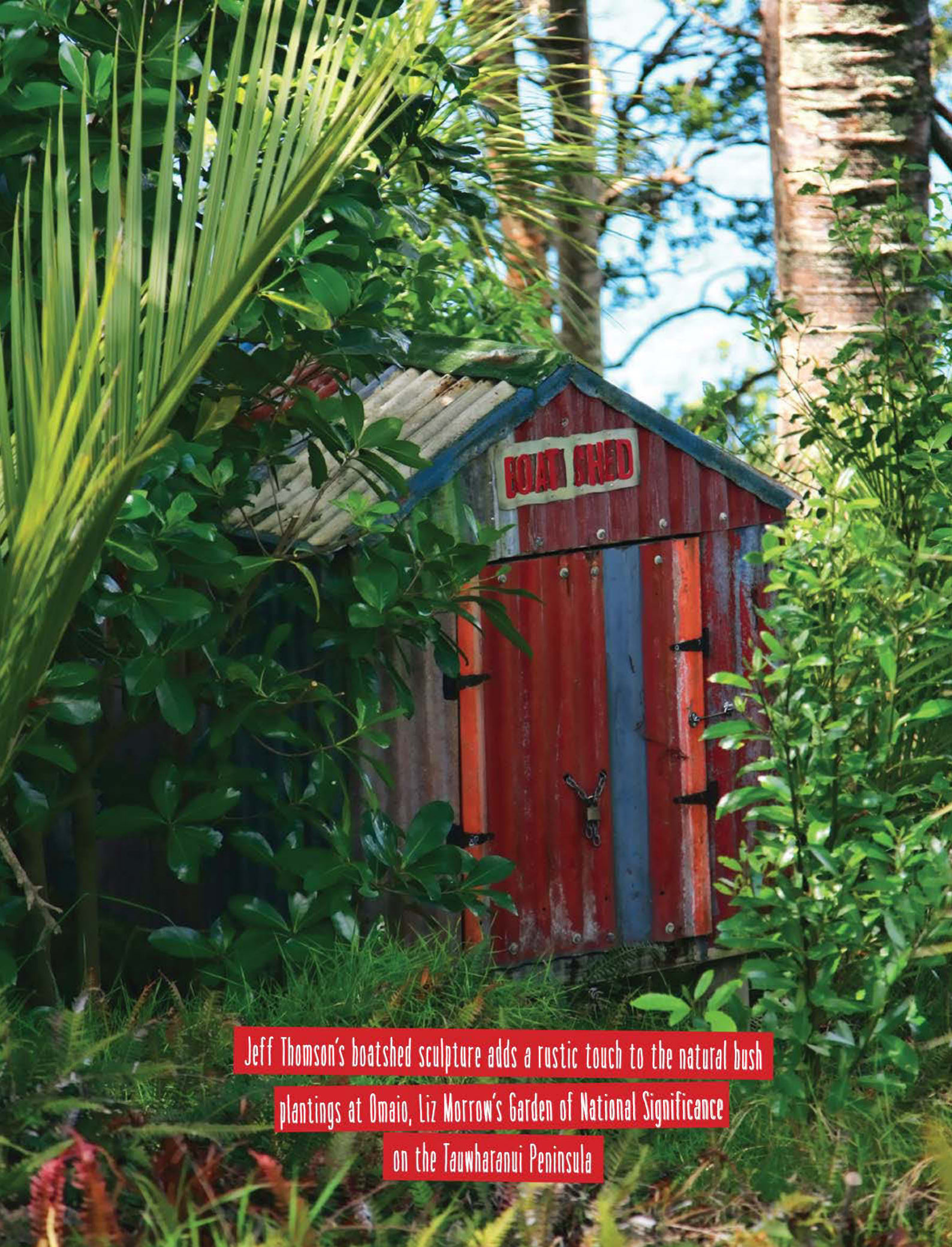
Les Floralties, an international luxury bodycare and homewares brand that uses manuka honey, lavender and olive oil among its key ingredients, has recently moved to Matakana. Now rebranded as Matakana Botanicals, a shop and café are due to open in September. In the meantime the full range is available at Finishing Touches in Matakana (under the cinema complex) or online at matakanabotanicals.co.nz.

10 BUY LANDSCAPING SUPPLIES AND PLANTS AT TUMBLEWEED

At 939 Matakana Road, Tumbleweed Coastal Plants is the place to pick up plants chosen for local conditions. Open seven days; a landscape design and garden management service is available too. See tumbleweed.net.nz for details.



Clockwise from top left: Mark and Isabella Sullivan from Matakana Olive Co-operative at the Matakana Farmers Market; Corrina Hoseason's sculpture *Prime Cuts* at The Vivian Gallery; Skincare and scented products in the herb garden at Matakana Botanicals; Stocking up with potted colour at Tumbleweed Coastal Plants; Coastal-friendly furniture for sale at Board & Batten; Grass tree at Matakana Palms.



Jeff Thomson's boatshed sculpture adds a rustic touch to the natural bush plantings at Omaio, Liz Morrow's Garden of National Significance on the Tauwharanui Peninsula



Clockwise from top: Sturdy natives in the Takana Nursery shadehouse; Eclectic finds at Rummage; Blueberries at OOB; The Bali Garden; Cooling off at Charlies Gelato.



The Matakana collectables trail covers six fascinating curio galleries, selling everything from vintage clothing to homewares



11 FOLLOW THE MATAKANA WINE TRAIL FROM ASCENSION

The sunny hillsides in all directions are draped with a blanket of vines. Many boutique vineyards are open to the public and sell delicious wines at the cellar door or restaurant. Check matakanawine.com for opening hours, tours and bookings. Ascension Wine Estate, at 480 Matakana Road, is well known as a concert and wedding venue and restaurant. For bookings, opening times and programme of events visit ascensionwine.co.nz.

12 SAVOUR FINE SORBETTOS AT CHARLIES GELATO GARDEN

Gelato and sorbetto are made daily from local, seasonal fruit – we loved the divine lemon sorbet. Don't miss the Fine Line Gallery here too: 17 Sharp Road, off Matakana Road. Check seasonal opening times at charliesgelato.co.nz.

13 VISIT TAKANA NATIVES FOR BIG SPECIMEN TREES

Don Turner sells large specimens of over 75 varieties of native trees that grow well from Waikato to Bay of Plenty northwards. Full catalogue and plant descriptions at takana.co.nz or visit the nursery at 102 Omaha Flats Road.

14 PICK UP A NIKAU OR TWO AT MATAKANA PALMS

Sharing the same driveway as Takana is Matakana Palms, which specialises in Pitt Island nikau and grass trees. They also stock landscape supplies including my mother's secret weapon: the garden mix that fuels her colourful and productive garden.

15 GO BONKERS FOR BLUEBERRIES AT OOB ORGANIC CAFE

Once a pick-your-own orchard, OOB now produces fresh and frozen organic berries or turns them into ice-cream. On a hot day visit the orchard at 89 Jones Road, Omaha for ice-cream or go to the OOB Organic Café, 2 Matakana Valley Road, Matakana (oob.co.nz).



LADY DRIVERS

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that little, old ladies drive little, old cars. This overlooks the needs of little, old lady gardeners. Our idea of a good time is stuffing the boot with plants, buying yet another colourful pot, grabbing large, awkwardly-shaped treasures from roadside inorganic collections or gathering mounds of sea grass for mulch. We are not as limber as we used to be – decades of gardening have taken their toll on knees and lower backs – and we are not as tall as we used to be.

The Outlander VRX was a revelation in terms of comfort, safety and convenience. It's a four-wheel-drive SUV that feels like a car, and was very easy to drive on the motorway, winding country roads and gravel.

Getting in and out was easy, the seats are adjustable and can be warmed on chilly days. Visibility in all directions is superb and backing is a breeze: when reversing, a dashboard screen shows exactly what's behind the car – a life saver when children could be playing in the driveway. A diagram shows exactly where the car is and how far it is to the nearest obstacles. The tailgate rises and lowers at the touch of a button – so handy when both hands are full of impulse buys!

We weren't even bamboozled by the electronics. Even without a manual, setting the cruise control, trip meter and the radio stations was achieved with minimal fiddling of buttons. The Outlander seats seven (a third row of seats lift up at the back) and would make a good family vehicle with easy access for car seats. The back seats fold down to provide plenty of room for four outdoor chairs, a chilly bin, a wine box and a barrow load of plants!

Barbara Smith



16 TAKE IN A TOUCH OF THE TROPICS AT THE BALI GARDEN

Bali Hacienda imports sculptures and outdoor furniture; showroom open October-April. The 9ha garden and palm nursery at 292 Point Wells Road is open by appointment; balihacienda.com.

17 FILL THE FRIDGE AT THE OMAHA FRUIT AND VEG STALLS

Down the driveway at 279 Omaha Flats Road, past rows of spray-free and out-of-the-ordinary veges, is Quail Farm. The shop Mrs Allsorts, before the causeway (327 Omaha Flats Road), has produce, flowers, plants, craft and pre-loved goods.

18 BUY ECO-SOURCED NATIVE PLANTS AT LIBERTY PARK

This garden centre and native tree nursery at 90 Jones Road, Omaha stocks revegetation grades to large trees, shrubs and perennials; libertypark.co.nz.

Stopping off at the cellar door of Ascension Wine Estate before heading off on the Matakana Wine Trail. How many cases of wine can we fit in the back?

19 RUMMAGE FOR TREASURES ON THE COLLECTABLES TRAIL

Six intriguing curio galleries make up this trail. Rummage (corner Anderson and Matakana roads) has a retro feel. Green with Envy (corner Matakana and Sharp roads) has vintage-inspired garden and home wares. For more details see collectablestrail.co.nz.

20 TITIVATE YOUR OUTDOOR SPACES AT BOARD & BATTEN

An impressive black barn at the top of the hill before Matakana Village (897 Matakana Road) houses Board & Batten Interior Design, where Deb Crowe designs from "the front gate to the back fence" so there is plenty of inspiration for gardens and outdoor living.

MARCH

Gardening odds & sods

Fantastic bulbs, a new curator for the National Arboretum, win theatre tickets and lawn growing kits, your questions, growing living stones & forest gardening

NEW PLANTS



TULIPA 'RONALDO'

is a new deepest-mahogany tulip, sturdier than 'Black Diamond' and even darker. It flowers mid- to late-spring, and grows 40cm high.

From NZ Bulbs and Aorangi Bulb Nurseries.



LOMATIA FERRUGINEA

is an evergreen shrub or small tree (up to 10m) from Chile.

The ferny leaves and velvety stems are popular for floral art. Tolerates wet conditions, short dry periods and average frosts. From Woodleigh Nursery.



TULIPA 'ASAHI'

is a beautiful antique-rose colour blending to golden yellow – Asahi means morning sun in Japanese. It grows 40cm high and flowers from mid- to late-spring. From NZ Bulbs and Aorangi Bulb Nurseries.



NARCISSUS 'COTINGA'

is a mini daffodil with white petals and a cream cup maturing to pink. It grows to just 25cm, so it's good for containers and small gardens, and the flower stems appear in mid-spring. Available from NZ Bulbs.



IRIS 'HOLLAND LILAC'

is a new lilac-purple Dutch iris. It makes a great cut flower, with 75cm high stems and flowers appearing in mid-spring. From NZ Bulbs and Aorangi Bulb Nurseries.



CAESALPINIA FERREA

or the leopard tree, is a slender, shapely small tree from Brazil with delicate ferny foliage, small yellow flowers in spring and cream and tan bark. Perfect for a small courtyard. From Russell Fransham Subtropicals.



HYDRANGEA 'MERVEILLE SANGUINE'

aka 'Bloody Marvellous' is known for its dark leaves and blood-red mophead flowers. If grown in acid soils, however, the flowers turn a rich aubergine. Wonderful for cutting and drying. From Woodleigh Nursery.



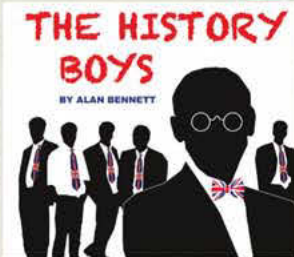
DOG-GONE SOUVENIR

Auckland woman fined for trying to import loquat plants

Gardeners returning from holidays overseas are being warned to not to bring any plant material back to New Zealand. This comes after a Henderson woman was fined \$3500 in the Manukau District Court for trying to get two loquat plants, with roots attached, past quarantine officers. In May last year, Yi Cui, 30, arrived at Auckland International Airport from China but failed to declare the plants on her passenger arrival card. She was on her way to the exit gate when

a detector dog picked up something of interest. Cui denied she had any food or plants but a quarantine inspector soon noticed the two plants up Cui's sleeve. Craig Hughes, of the Ministry of Primary Industries, says these plants posed a serious biosecurity risk to New Zealand. "This sentencing is the end result of another great intercept by one of our detector dog teams and will act as a deterrent to those passengers attempting to circumvent our screening processes."

GIVEAWAYS



TICKETS TO THE HISTORY BOYS

Alan Bennett's award-winning play is presented by PIC Insurance Brokers and Stripec Live on stage at The PumpHouse Theatre, Auckland. There are two double passes to win, valued at \$60. Book at The PumpHouse Theatre, phone 09 489 8360 or www.pumphouse.co.nz



LAWN PACKS FROM BURNET'S

Grow an all-purpose, hard-wearing, lush Boston Green lawn. Six packs to win, each containing EzyStrike Boston Green seed (900gm, \$26.99), EzyStart fertiliser (2kg, \$21.99) and EzyFert slow release lawn food (2kg, \$21.99).

Visit burnets.co.nz for more details.

NEW FACE AT ARBORETUM

Eastwoodhill, near Gisborne, has welcomed a new curator for its 135ha national collection of exotic and native trees

The new curator of Eastwoodhill has described his appointment as a "dream come true". Dan Haliday took up the role in February, and will oversee the care of 135 hectares of exotic and native trees, shrubs and climber plantings.

"Over my career in horticulture there have been many highlights and this opportunity will be the jewel in the crown," says Dan. "Botany has been in my blood from early childhood. I was naturally attracted to learning about every tree and plant I came in contact with. This has never left me and sharing it as curator is a fantastic gift."

Dan has worked for Napier Parks and Recreation, in private gardens, and in the tree nursery trade as a horticultural broker. His wife, Monique (pictured with Dan below), will also be working there as education and membership officer. "I had the pleasure of introducing her to Eastwoodhill 30 years ago," Dan says.

Dan's first official act as curator will be to open the new natural playground, which features some of the biggest swings in the country. Designed by Tina Dyer, the \$300,000 playground has already seen some action from young visitors, but will be officially opened after the parents' viewing platform is completed in March.



COMPETITION ENTRY DETAILS Write your contact details and choice of prize on the back of an envelope and mail to Garden Giveaways, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141. Or enter online by visiting nzgardener.co.nz. Entries open March 2 and close April 5, 2015.

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Plant doctor

Q **WEEDY INSIGHT**
Weeds can be a pain, but they establish themselves where conditions suit them. For example docks grow where there is poor, damp soil. Knowing what weeds like can give clues about what's going on in the soil. Where can I find more info about weeds as environmental indicators?

JOHN COLE, AUCKLAND

A Weeds do get a bad rap but you are right, they'll always be around, so we might as well use them to our advantage. One way to do this is, as you suggest, to learn how to read their signals about certain environmental conditions. Instead of indiscriminately blitzing everything with herbicides, consider what weeds are telling you about drainage problems, lack of nutrients, alkaline or acidic soils or depleted topsoil.

Buttercups, for example, are a sign of poor drainage and acidic soil. Cow parsley grows where there's excess nitrogen, clover grows where it's lacking.

Weeds have other redeeming features as well. Some are edible; dandelions, nasturtiums and lamb's quarters can be added to salads. As quick colonisers of bare soil, weeds can prevent erosion by wind and rain. Weeds can also work as a green crop, restoring fertility to overworked soils as they lie fallow. Deep-rooted weeds like comfrey retrieve nutrient minerals from the subsoil and store nutrients that could be leached or blown away. Don't forget benefits for wildlife, either: flowering weeds can be vital food sources for bees and many are host plants for butterflies. Plantain in pasture increases the nutritional value of grass for grazing stock.

For a list of weed indicators for Kiwi conditions visit organicnz.org.nz, click on the tab organic and then on weeds/diseases. To identify weeds growing at your place, search for 'weeds database' on Massey University's site massey.ac.nz or visit weedbusters.co.nz.

Barbara Smith



Q **MYSTERY FRUIT**
I was wondering if you could identify this fruit (pictured above) that a friend in our garden group has growing on her property. It fruits in spring and has a flowery citrus fragrance but remains hard and sour.

HEATHER SWINBURN, HAWKE'S BAY

A Sheryn Clothier, editor of *Tree Cropper*, the NZ Tree Crops Association journal, and some NZTCA members provided the answer to your question.

The fruit looks like *Poncirus trifoliata*, the rootstock commonly used for citrus. If so, it will have large thorns and a trifoliate leaf (a leaf with three leaflets). *Trifoliata* is not a true citrus but is the favoured rootstock for most citrus in New Zealand. This is because it goes dormant in autumn, leaving firm, ripened growth that is more tolerant of our cold climate. It also has a dwarfing affect, so the tree doesn't grow too tall, and is resistant to diseases like root rot (phytophthora) and collar rotting fungi. On citrus trees you will often see a thorny side branch coming away from the base; this should be removed as soon as possible, or it may grow and supersede the original orange, tangelo or mandarin – as has happened to your friend's tree.

Sheryn also says that the trifoliata fruit can apparently be made into marmalade, or dried into powder to be made into a condiment... but she admits she has never met anyone in New Zealand who is that hungry.

NZTCA (treecrops.org.nz) is a voluntary organisation that promotes interest in useful and productive trees.

Barbara Smith



BEST BAMBOO

Q I would like to plant bamboo to make a leafy screen at least 3m high to cut off any sight between two properties. It should have leaves the entire length of the stalk as to hide the buildings. Please could you recommend a species?

JIMMY WINTERS, PAIHIA

A Simon Vallings maintains a collection of economically valuable bamboo species at his Maungatapere nursery, Forest Floor. For a privacy screen, Simon recommends a clumping species of bamboo, rather than a running type, which can spread. *Bambusa* is the genus most widely used in New Zealand for dense hedging and shelter. *Bambusa multiplex* is the smallest and most hardy, and several cultivars grow into a dense wall up to 6m high, producing strong stems about 20mm in diameter that make good stakes. If height is an issue, *Bambusa multiplex* 'Golden Goddess' is one of the smallest cultivars and only gets to 3-4m and grows as a dense clump of thin stems.

Simon's personal favourite is the stunning *Himalayacalamus hookerianus* known as Himalayan Blue bamboo (pictured above). It grows to 7-8m high. The stems change through the year from powdery sky blue to a deep, dark purple. Planted 600mm to 1m apart, it makes a very tidy tall hedge. If given extra watering at establishment it will quickly grow to fill the spot. Like most bamboos it is very drought-hardy once established. Visit forestfloor.co.nz for other bamboo species that are useful for stock food, shelter, cane production and more.

Barbara Smith



ONE SICKLY ROSE

Q What is wrong with my 'Charles Austin' rose? Last year it was a picture of health and happiness, but this year it has not grown at all and the flowers are very small. The roses around it are all in good health.

BUNNY DAVIS, ROTORUA

A We asked rosarian Bob Matthews for his expert advice. He replied that your garden looks impressive, and the problem is not that unusual. The David Austin rose is showing twirly leaves and misshapen growth, suspiciously like some form of contamination, which could be from a number of sources. It looks minor and the plant will probably grow out of this given time – provided that the contamination source has been removed or the natural biological cycle reduces this to nothing. Quite often these things sort themselves out and can be helped by strategic trimming, plenty of good fertiliser and water, all of which helps the plant grow strongly.

The symptoms are similar to glyphosphate exposure, which Bob strongly advises against using in or around any roses. Or it could be one of the many lawn sprays, either from residue left in the sprayer (a common mistake) or drift from over-zealous spraying. Bob warns that it's not necessarily directly from recent spraying. It could be soil that includes composted grass clippings that were sprayed before mowing. Time mostly heals all these issues, so don't remove or replace the rose at this early stage. Try some TLC and see what happens.

Barbara Smith



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ROCK 'N' ROLL

Is it a stone? Is it a plant? A growing guide to the weird and wonderful lithop

KID PARADE



CHARLEE COOPER (8)

loves eating cherry tomatoes grown in her Auckland garden.



ELI EAGLE (4)

of Hokitika is very happy with his first potato harvest.



RUBY LITTLE (2)

dresses in style to water grandma's Auckland garden.



COCO PINK (3)

loves the flowers, birds and bees in her Auckland garden.

HOW TO GROW LIVING STONES



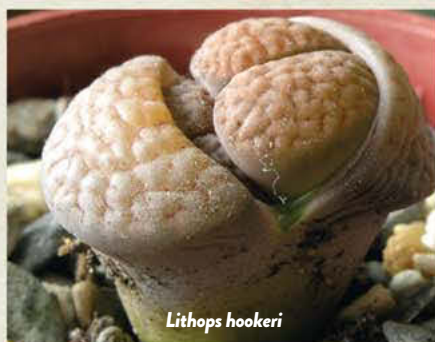
Lithops schwantesii



Lithops aucampiae



Lithops pseudotruncatella



Lithops hookeri

Children are fascinated by lithops, also known as living stones. These plants come from the wide open, pebbly plains of southern Africa, so they're used to hot burning sun and love lots of sunshine. As such they're not used to getting any rain in winter, so they can't grow outside in New Zealand. Instead, says Graeme Fieldes, from the Cactus and Succulent Society of New Zealand, the best place to grow them is on a sunny windowsill, perhaps in a bonsai dish that is at least 10cm deep.

Lithops bloom in autumn, when daisy-like white or yellow flowers emerge from the centre. After flowering, the two lips pull back, shrivel up and die away, leaving a new plant under each lip. And so, says Graeme, one plant becomes two.

"The next year one might flower, one might not, so then you'll have three plants!" By the time they have seven or eight plants, you can split them up to go in two pots. They can be grown from seed, but it is difficult to raise them from cuttings – they are full of water so if cut they tend to bleed and shrivel.

Graeme says the main thing to remember when growing lithops is to keep them completely dry during the winter. He stops watering when the overnight temperature drops below 10°C, and doesn't start again until it rises above this. In summer, they need a good watering every 7-10 days, but make sure to let them dry out completely between drinks. Graeme sources his lithops from Coromandel Cacti (cacti.co.nz).



CHARLIE CONNOLLY (2½)

samples the parsley in her grandpa's Culverden garden.

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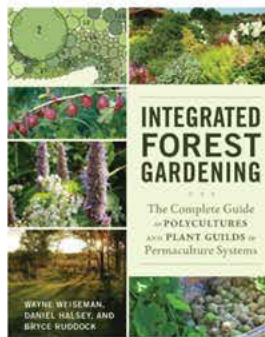
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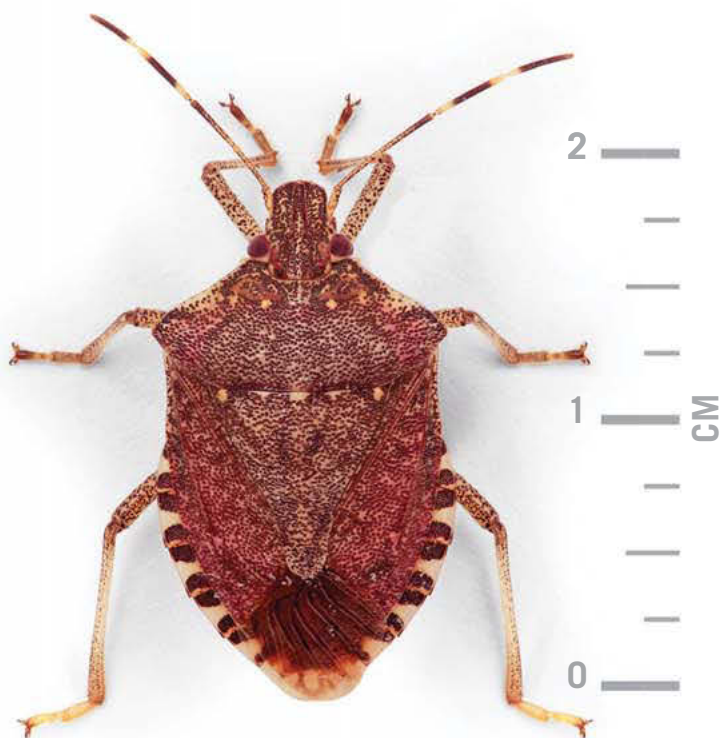
Bookshelf



INTEGRATED FOREST GARDENING by Wayne Weiseman, Daniel Halsey & Bruce Ruddock; Chelsea Green; RRP\$72.99

Permaculture is having a moment. With the increasing pressure on our ecosystems, the approach to gardening aims to bring our natural surroundings back to a healthy balance through nourishing the soil, planting edible crops, and making use of "waste" land and water. By observing the interactions between sun, climate, soil and plants within a specific area, we can reduce the need for human intervention. So far, so

obvious. But this book goes further. It shows how you don't need heaps of spare acreage to create a "forest"; here, it refers to the dense planting of nutrient-rich edible perennials on our doorsteps that can sustain both humans and wildlife. And by using every spare inch, from under the soil to the "forest" canopy, you can choose an almost endless variety of plants for food. The guide covers plant guilds – beneficial groupings which support each other and the ecosystem as a whole; carrying capacity; site selection and guild design; nutrient (re)cycling; tree types; an extremely useful chapter on project management, as well as case studies of plant guilds used in different American settings. All these ideas, while obvious, will take some time to work through when designing a garden from scratch – and there is little room for "useless" ornamentals like roses or annuals. But this is a thoughtful, highly detailed guide. Follow nature's lead is very much the mantra here. *Christine Rush*



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Events guide

NORTH ISLAND

March

• Hollard Gardens International Children's Day Celebration

Kid's activities, music and games. 10am-3pm. In association with Taranaki Kindergarten. Sponsored by POWERCO. Free entry. 1686 Upper Manaia Rd, Kaponga. 0800 736 222. hollardgardens.info. **March 1**

• **Martinborough Fair.** Hundreds of stalls in and around the village square. 8am-4pm. martinborough-fair.org.nz. **March 7**

• **Cheese Making: 4 Cheeses in 1 Day** workshop by Curious Cook Alexis Murti. Palmerston North Leisure Centre, 569 Fergusson St, 930am-2pm. \$95. Book at curious-cook.co.nz. **March 8**

• **Wellington Parks Week.** Over 30 events and activities. wellington.govt.nz/parksweek. **March 7-15**

• **North Shore Home & Garden Show.** North Shore Events Centre, off Porana Rd, Glenfield, Auckland. Fri & Sat 10-6, Sun 10-5. Adult \$8, senior special Friday \$4, under 16 free. homeandgardenshow.co.nz. **March 20-22**

• **Otari-Wilton's Bush seminars.** Information Centre 7.30pm. Cost: Koha/gold coin. wellington.govt.nz/otari. **March 3, 10, 17, 24, 31**

• **Wellington Botanic Garden walk** Trees for health and healing. Meet 11am at the duck pond for this easy 90-minute walk with one uphill section. Cost: \$4. **March 15**

• **Taupo: Baches to Beautiful Homes Tour.** View 10 gorgeous homes and gardens. All proceeds to Violence Prevention. Tickets \$75 includes celebration drinks party entry with complimentary bubbles and chance to win spot prizes, entry into the draw for a Helipro Panoramic Tour of Taupo. From Harcourts, REAP or bachestobeautifulhomestourtaupo.org. **March 21**

• **Auckland Area Annual Floral Art Show.** At the North Shore Home and Garden Show, North Shore Events Centre, Glenfield. Featuring an inter-club challenge, and an exciting and interesting exhibition of floral art designs "Through the Ages". 10am-6pm. Email fasnz.org.nz for more information. **March 20-22**

• Otari-Wilton's Bush Treasure Trail.

Join us on a guided walk on the trail designed by Dr John Dawson to showcase the treasures of New Zealand flora. Meet 2pm at the Otari Information Centre for this easy, mainly flat 90-minute walk. Cost: \$3. wellington.govt.nz/otari. **March 22**

• **Hollard Gardens Mini Orchards Workshop.** Take a small sunny space and create your own orchard using food forest concepts and companion planting. Enjoy food from plot to plate all year round. 1686 Upper Manaia Rd, Kaponga. 2-4pm. 0800 736 222. hollardgardens.info. **March 22**

• **Pukeiti Puffer Fun Run.** A range of easy to very challenging fun runs through the beautiful Pukeiti rain-forest. Fundraising for the Cameron ClowTrust and TET AthleticsTaranaki. Great prizes to be won. Entry by donation. 2290 Carrington Rd, New Plymouth. 0800 736 222. pukeiti.org.nz. 10.30am-2pm. **March 22**

• **Wellington Botanic Garden guided walk: the mighty oak.** Oaks are a large group of economically important trees. Many of them are valued for their impressive size and appearance, and for their splendid autumn colours. On this moderate 90-minute walk we look at several species of oak in the Botanic Garden. Meet 11am at the Cable Car entrance, Upland Road. Cost: \$4. wellington.govt.nz. **March 23**

• **FloravisionNZ.** National Floral Art Exhibition of over 250 original and creative designs. Sir Howard Morrison Performing Arts Centre, 1170 Fenton St, Rotorua. Thu noon-4.30pm, Fri 9.30am-4.30pm, Sat 9.30am-1.30pm. Entry \$10. Enquiries ph 07 357 4433, email treasurer@fasnz.org.nz. **March 26-28**

• **Auckland Herb Society, AGM and workshops** including making herbal condiments & wild flower seed papers to take home and plant. All materials supplied. Free entry. Morning tea. Trading table, plants and natural beauty products for sale. 9.30am, Horticulture Rooms, 990 Great North Rd, Western Springs. Contacts: Helen ph 09 479 7344, Lynn ph 09 818 4348. **March 28**

• **Sixth Great Pumpkin Carnival.** Rhododendron Lawn, Hamilton Gardens. Free family fun with lots to

do and see and enter, see thegreatpumpkincarnival.co.nz for programme and category details. Don't miss the downhill roll where the pumpkins bounce and smash in a very messy way. **March 29**

April

• Hollard Harvest Festival.

Celebrate the harvest spirit with family activities in the gardens. Music and entertainment, food for all, competitions for kids, and useful demonstrations. Easter Monday fun. 1686 Upper Manaia Rd, Kaponga. 10am-3pm. 0800 736 222. hollardgardens.info. **April 6**

• **Wellington Better Home & Living Show.** Westpac Stadium, Waterloo Quay, Wellington. Fri & Sat 10-6, Sun 10-5. Adult \$8, senior special Friday \$5, under 16 free. betterhomeandlivingshow.co.nz. **April 10-12**

• **South Auckland Bromeliad Group Annual Show.** Gorgeous display of bromeliads and plenty of plants for sale. Entry and parking are free. Auckland Botanic Gardens, Hill Rd, Manurewa. 9am-3pm. **April 12**

SOUTH ISLAND

March

• Canterbury Workers' Educational Association Centenary Celebrations.

Book launch and events. Programme at cwea.org.nz. Register online or call WEA 03 366 0285. **March 4-7**

• **Tai Tapu Sculpture Garden exhibition.** Over three weekends in March permanent works and others that are for sale by many of New Zealand's leading sculptors are on display. We're looking forward to hosting some new artists in addition to the following five who exhibited at the garden in 2014: Graham Bennett, Bing Dawe, Ben Foster, Doug Neil, Lew Summers. All welcome. Parking

provided. Picnickers welcome during open hours. 199 Cossars Rd, RD2, Tai Tapu, Christchurch. 11am-3pm. Ph 03 329 6662, taitapusculturegarden.co.nz. **March 7-8, 14-15, 21-22**

• Canterbury Dahlia Circle Show

Also display of roses, crafts and sales table. St Peter's Church Hall, Church Corner, Upper Riccarton. Christchurch. 1-4pm. Free entry.

March 14

• Celebration of Southland

Gardens. 19 gardens to visit. Plan your itinerary at southlandgardens.co.nz. Contact Lynne Huggins ph 03 214 1769, email southlandgardens.tovisit@gmail.com **March 21-22**

• Heritage Harvest Festival.

Interactive displays, workshops (start 9.30am), competitions & activities. Bring along your best or most interesting fruit & vegetables for the display or just come to look & learn. Aparima College Hall, 33 Leader St, Riverton, Southland. For workshops and more info contact South Coast Environment Centre ph 03 234 8717, sces.org.nz. **March 28-29**

Future Living Festival. Geraldine South Canterbury. A festival to inform, inspire and entertain with a sustainable future in mind. Everything from Weed Workshops and Incredible Edibles to Zero Waste. futurelivingfestival.co.nz. **March 26-29**

April

• **South Canterbury Iris Group free autumn seminar.** Speakers, sales table. Lunch provided. Caroline Bay Community Lounge, Timaru. 9am-4pm. RSVP by April 4 to Graham Menary email graham.menary@gmail.com, ph 03 689 6196, cell 027 593 6806. **April 11**

• **Akaroa Harvest Festival.** 30 stalls showcasing locally sourced produce ranging from mussel and paua fritters and hand-made bresaola and chorizo, to Peninsula-sourced honey and award-winning olive oil. Live music, local wine, and traditional games like sack races. Akaroa Area School, 141 Rue Jolie, Akaroa from 10am-4.30pm. **April 10**

• **Go Wild With Weaving Workshops.** Make your own beautiful baskets. Weave willow, flax, bark. Choice of six tutors. Two-day workshops. Golden Bay. gowillow.co.nz/go-wild-2015 **April 11-12**

Free event listings.

Send your event details (at least 10 weeks ahead) to: Events Guide, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley Street, Auckland 1141; or email mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz with "Event Listing" in the subject line.

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EVENTS & SHOWS

- **Floral Art Society of NZ 10th National** exhibition featuring spectacular and creative designs. Sir Howard Morrison Performing Arts Centre, 1170 Fenton Street, Rotorua. March 26 noon-4.30pm, 27 9.30am-4.30pm, 28 9.30am-1.30pm. Entry \$10. Enquiries Ph 07 357 4433 or email treasurer@fasnz.org.nz
- **North Shore Home & Garden Show.** March 20-22, North Shore Events Centre, off Porana Rd, Glenfield, Auckland. Fri & Sat 10-6, Sun 10-5. Adult \$8, Senior Special Friday \$4, Under 16 Free. www.homeandgardenshow.co.nz
- **Wellington Better Home & Living Show.** April 10-12, Westpac Stadium, Waterloo Quay, Wellington. Fri & Sat 10-6, Sun 10-5. Adult \$8, senior special Friday \$5, under 16 free. www.betterhomeandlivingshow.co.nz

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- **Coatesville country gardens.** Open by appointment. Admission charged. Ph Woodbridge 09 415 7525, Mincher 09 415 7469, Twin Lakes 09 415 8762, Pine Lee 09 414 4338, Alafois 09 414 4324, The Garden on the Ridge 09 415 7315.
- **Dahlia Haven's 24th Annual Free Open Days** Saturdays 7th & 21st March 2015. 10.30am to 4.00pm. Also open by prior arrangement every Tues, Wed, Thurs Jan 27th to Mar 26th 11.00am-2.00pm. \$5.00 per head (weather permitting). 235 Wilks Road, Dairy Flat Albany. Ph 09 426 7150.

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- **www.daffodil.org.nz.** Everything you need to know about growing daffodils.
- **www.kiwiclivia.com.** Clivia specialists.
- **www.lavender.org.nz** Find growers, products, useful information. New Zealand Lavender Growers' Association.
- **www.magicmoss.co.nz** For all decorative moss and moss requirements.
- **www.marshwoodgardens.co.nz** For hardy perennials.
- **www.meadowlandirises.co.nz** For tall bearded irises.
- **www.mrclematis.co.nz.**
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- **www.trinityfarm.co.nz** Heritage rose specialists.
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joe bennett

In which the indefatigable alphabetic explicator considers the sad fate of Bingo, and how the trickiest flower may flourish under the right first-person pronoun

In your childhood, fellow tillers of the soil, did you have a cricket coach who went by the name of Bingo and whose forthright manner and vast moustache hid a soft heart? And did Bingo ever take you to one side when you had been more than usually selfish and whisper in your pink and innocent ear, “Joe, there is no ‘I’ in team”?

Well, neither did I as it happens. But I have to admit that I am warming to Bingo even as I invent him, and in particular to the moustache that could have served independently as an officer in the First World War. Indeed, the more clearly I picture Bingo and hear the words he never uttered the more I realise what truth the good man spoke. There is indeed no “I” in team.

But Bingo’s words prompt a further question, and I suspect some of you may have seen this question coming in a way that Bingo spectacularly failed to see that charging hippo when on safari with the Duke of Athlone (the father, naturally, not the wastrel son). (The coroner, by the way, attached no blame for Bingo’s death to the good duke.) The question: is there an “I” in gardening?

I, for one, hope that there is, for it would not go well with me were gardening to prove I-less. (I thought of a joke there involving Gaza but I refrained from cracking it for fear of distracting the more literary types. If, however, you would like to enjoy the joke at your leisure, a stamped addressed envelope to The Big Hall, Dust Huck’s Lea will reach me.)

The problem is my compendious *A to Y of Gardening*, of which this is part nine. On the assumption that an *A to Y* would comprise 25 instalments, I had binders made of that number in both genuine and ersatz imitation leatherette and I have advertised and sold these binders in considerable numbers.

Should there now prove to be no “I” in gardening, then my compendium would be an instalment short and I’d be obliged by the Consumer Guarantee Act to recall the binders and refund several million dollars. So it is a matter of some moment to me.

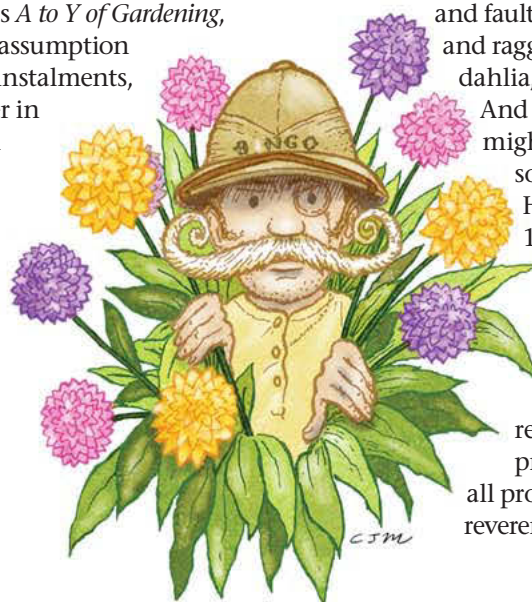
To resolve it we need to answer a simple question. If two people were to take identical dahlia seedlings, say, and thrust them into identical beds of potting mix, and subject them to identical regimes of heat, light and watering, would they get identical results? Or would the NPK of personality affect the blooms we got?

If, for example, both people sang to their dahlias, but one knocked out the Bagelmeister’s aria from *Turandot*, while the other sang only something cheesy from a Mascarpone operetta, would it make any difference to the blooms? If the plants flourished regardless, responding only to biological, chemical and physical forces which are by definition impersonal, then the only conclusion we could draw is there’s no “I” in gardening.

And if that were so, I would stand before the law as Bingo once stood before the hippo. In which circumstances I could only hope that I’d muster the fortitude Bingo displayed, for at the very moment that the hippo’s hoof crushed his sternum he declared, in a voice that caused a flock of flamingos to take to the skies, his undying love for the Duchess of Athlone (the late Stephanie, naturally, not that slatternly Lara).

But just as I was pondering Bingo’s grim fate an image arose in my mind of the sainted editor of this magazine, she of the stately mien, the V12 intellect and the fingers so green they have been mistaken for beans (the smooth and faultless ‘Fardenlosa’, naturally, not the rude and ragged runner). I pictured her planting a dahlia, and me planting another alongside it. And the notion that the blooms on my plant might compete with the blooms on hers was so laughable as to be close to blasphemy. Her flowers would outshine mine by 100,000 watts. It was an obvious and fundamental truth of nature.

The upshot of which is that “who” must matter, and there IS an “I” in gardening and there always will be. So the *A to Y* lives on (unlike dear Bingo, rest his good bones). And once again we prove the truth of the columnar motto: all problems in this world can be resolved by reverent contemplation of the editor’s being. ❀



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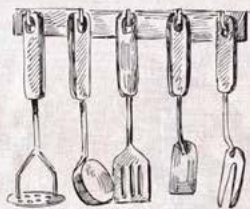




Editorial

Preserving is said to be having a renaissance. While once it might have been the preserve (ho ho) of our grandmothers, a throwback to wartime austerity and dusty Women's Institutes, now it is positively trendy, with jam making equipment sales soaring. Why, even celebrities are at it. A few years ago, the British papers got themselves up in a froth over the fact that the model Kate Moss had been making damson jam with the fruit from her Cotswolds orchard. She was so pleased with the result, it was reported, she even thought of selling it (well, I suppose the famously gamine Moss wouldn't have been in the market for eating much of it).

Unlike Moss, I am not, in any way, en vogue. Fashions come and go around me, fads for the most part pass me by. But I can truly say I was an early adopter when it came to preserving. I am, for once in my life, perfectly on trend since I have been making jams and bottling fruit since I was just a schoolgirl. One of my earliest memories is my grandmother's kitchen, on the farm in Tokarahi, north Otago, with the shelves of the pantry packed with Agee jars full of bottled fruit. (As an aside, when my grandmother died, the farm was sold, and those Agee jars were never to be seen again. Given the aforementioned popularity of preserving, Agee jars are now both rare and pricey. I often pine for the dozens my grandmother had collected over her life.)



My grandmother would certainly consider that sort of sentiment to be foolishness. She did not fill the shelves because it was fashionable to do so, she did it simply because she had to. On the farm, it was perhaps not pickle or perish, but if you didn't preserve your summer and autumn bounty you faced an exceedingly dull diet over winter.

It is different for me, of course. I live in a city and almost all food is abundantly available all year around. But I still like to go into the garden with a trug and spend a happy few hours in the kitchen messing about with what I've picked, lining up the full bottles and jars. There is a glow of satisfaction of looking at your groaning pantry shelves and bursting freezer drawers and knowing you have all that deliciousness ahead of you. A spoonful of strawberry jam in winter is not just a taste of the summer just been, it's a reminder that summer will come again.

Actually the whole NZ *Gardener* team is keen on preserving. In summer and autumn, most of us come in on a Monday morning a little sticky. We share the results too of course (in fact editorial assistant Barbara Smith pointed out our office Secret Santa is really just an excuse to exchange jams). This is a collection of our very

favourite preserving recipes... all worth sharing I hope you enjoy them.

To

Jo McCarroll

Preserving basics

There are four key

ingredients you'll need for any and all sweet preserves.

Fruit: Use your best fruit. As fruit becomes over-ripe, the level of pectin in it declines.

Pectin: A natural substance found in all fruit (and some veges) that causes preserves to set when combined with acid and sugar. Some fruit, such as apples, contains lots of pectin; some very little.

Acid: This is what draws pectin from fruit. Some fruit, like lemons, are naturally high in acid, so lemon juice is often added if preserving something non-acidic.

Sugar: This is what keeps the fruit from spoiling, or preserves it. To be a true jam, a preserve must contain 60 per cent or more of sugar. Anything less, and it's a compote or fruit spread.



Brought to you by



Sweet preserves

Transform your garden's autumn abundance into delicious jams, jellies and pastes and you'll be able to enjoy your homegrown harvests all year round



Easy berry jam

Berries are naturally

low in pectin, so always use a jam setting sugar (to which pectin has been added) to make berry jams. This is a good, bright jam, and you can use whatever berries you have to hand, fresh or frozen.

Ingredients

- 1 large Granny Smith apple, peeled and finely chopped
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup lemon juice
- 500g raspberries • 300g strawberries, hulled and sliced
- 200g blackberries
- 1kg jam setting sugar

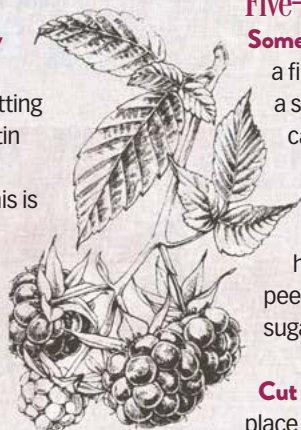
Place a saucer in the freezer. Combine chopped apple, lemon juice, raspberries, strawberries and blackberries in a large saucepan. Bring to the boil and cook, uncovered, stirring occasionally for 6-8 minutes or until the apple is just tender.

Add jam setting sugar, stirring over a medium heat for 1 minute or until sugar dissolves. Bring to the boil and boil rapidly for 3-4 minutes, removing any scum with a large metal spoon.

Start testing at 3 minutes. Setting times will vary, depending on saucepan size and heat of hot plate. Take the saucer out of the freezer and drop a small amount of jam on it; the surface should wrinkle when a spoon is pushed through it.

Ladle hot jam into sterilised jars and screw on lid to seal. Turn upside down for 5 minutes to draw a vacuum. Turn upright and set aside until cooled. Label, date and store in a cool, dark place.

Recipe courtesy of Chelsea



Five-minute apple & raspberry jam

Some raspberries are dual-croppers, with

a first harvest around December and a second in early autumn on last year's canes, provided winter chill is adequate. If you want to double-dip, try 'Aspiring' or 'Ivory'.

Ingredients • 500g raspberries, hulled and rinsed • 500g apples, peeled and cored • 1kg jam setting sugar • A knob of butter

Cut the apple into small pieces and place in a food processor. Process lightly until a paste forms. Place the raspberries in the food processor and pulse to gently break up.

Place the apple and raspberry mixture and sugar in a heavy-based 6-litre pot. Heat the mixture over a low heat until the sugar is dissolved. Do not allow to boil.

Add a knob of butter (about 10g), increase the heat and bring to a full boil (a boil that cannot be stirred down).

Boil for 4 minutes. Remove from the heat, skim off foam, test for set and bottle. Makes 4-5 medium-sized jars.

Recipe courtesy of Chelsea

Blackcurrant jam

NZ Gardener editor Jo McCarroll says this is the first blackcurrant jam she ever made. "The recipe's from an old *Edmonds Cook Book* and is yet to be bettered."

Ingredients • 1kg blackcurrants, stalks removed • 6 cups sugar • 2 cups water

Put the blackcurrants and water into a preserving pan. Boil gently until fruit is soft. Add sugar. Stir until dissolved. Bring to the boil and boil rapidly for 15 minutes or until setting point is reached. Pour into sterilised jars.

A knob of butter
added to jam just
before you bottle it
removes the scum that
forms on top and
helps it to set



Tamarillo jam

Ingredients • 6 plump tamarillos • 2 cups water • 4 cups sugar

Cut fruit in half. Place in a large saucepan with the water. Bring to the boil. Remove tamarillo skins and return fruit to water. Simmer for 5 minutes. Mash fruit, add the sugar and boil again for 10 minutes. Stir frequently and test for setting, then cool slightly. Pour into sterilised jars and seal.

Dried apricot, passionfruit & pumpkin jam

Not as odd as it sounds! Try it on scones or even as a curry side dish.

Ingredients • 250g dried apricots chopped • 4 cups water • 400g chopped pumpkin (approx 3 cups finely diced) • 1kg sugar • ½ cup lemon juice • ½ cup passionfruit pulp (or substitute with a small can of crushed pineapple)

Soak chopped apricots in water overnight. In the same water boil apricots and pumpkin for 20 minutes. Add sugar and boil for 25 minutes. Add lemon juice and passionfruit.

Boil for 5 minutes. Bottle while hot in sterilised jars. Cover when cold.

Both recipes courtesy of Chelsea



Kiwifruit jelly

Ingredients • 4 cups peeled and crushed kiwifruit pulp • ¼ cup water • 4 cups sugar (approximately) • 1 sachet pectin (available from supermarkets)

Bring the kiwifruit pulp and water to a gentle simmer for five minutes in a large pot, then strain through a jelly bag or muslin cloth overnight. Measure the strained juice. Place in a large pot with an equal amount of cups of sugar. Add the pectin and bring to the boil. Boil for about 4 minutes, then pour into hot, sterilised jars and seal immediately.

Passionfruit curd

Delicious on toast or pikelets.

Ingredients • 125g butter • ¾ cup caster sugar • 2 fresh, free-range eggs • pulp of 6 passionfruit

Melt the butter with the caster sugar in a large bowl over a pan of simmering water. Stir until the sugar has dissolved, then add eggs and passionfruit pulp. Stir vigorously until thickened, then transfer to hot, sterilised jars and seal. This will keep in the fridge for around two weeks.

To test if your jam or jelly has reached setting point

Drop a little on a cold saucer, leave to cool for a minute, and push it with your finger. If the surface wrinkles, setting point has been reached. If it slides about as a liquid, boil for another minute or two.



Feijoa conserve

Ingredients • 1kg sugar • 500ml water
• juice of 2 lemons • 20 medium-sized feijoas, peeled

Make a syrup by dissolving sugar in the water and adding lemon juice. Bring to the boil, then turn down the heat. Cut feijoas into thirds or quarters. Cook a few at a time in the boiling syrup until tender. Drain on baking paper. Boil the syrup to thicken. Pack feijoas into a clean, sterilised, warm preserving jar. Pour in sugar syrup to overflowing. Let air bubbles escape before sealing with lid. Lower sealed jar into a water bath on low heat to sterilise seals.

Feijoa paste

Great with tangy cheese and oatcakes.

Ingredients • 10 ripe medium-sized feijoas • 3 cooking apples • 600ml water
• 600g sugar

Use a potato peeler to remove skin from feijoas. Roughly chop fruit and weigh: you need 300g of sugar per 500g of fruit.

Put feijoa peel and roughly chopped apple and its cores into a pan; barely cover with the water. Cook until soft and mushy, about 10 minutes. Strain through a fine sieve, pressing firmly to get all the liquid from the apple. In a large, heavy-bottomed pot cook chopped feijoas in this liquid until soft. Push through a sieve or mash. Add sugar to feijoa pulp; stir until dissolved.

Cook slowly on the lowest heat, stirring every 2-3 minutes until thick.

This will take about 3 hours – when it's ready, the spoon should start to meet resistance and the mixture will start to come away from the sides. Pour while hot into straight-sided sterilised jars, and seal with lids.

Alternatively, line a straight-sided flat dish with baking paper. Pour in mixture and smooth over with a knife. Give the dish a couple of light taps on the bench to settle the paste. Leave to set for 2-3 days in a warm, dry place, then cut into cubes when cold and firm. Dust cubes with icing sugar and pack in a tin or jar, or place in box lined with waxed paper, with added sifted icing sugar.

Fig, apple & walnut paste

Ingredients • 500g (4 medium) Granny Smith apples, peeled and cored • juice of 1 lemon • 3 cups jam setting sugar • 1 cinnamon stick • 1¼ cups finely chopped dried figs • 125g toasted chopped walnuts

Line two 12 hole muffin trays with plastic wrap. Weigh apples, ensuring you have 500g. Process apples in food processor until they form a smooth puree.

Combine apple puree, lemon juice, sugar, cinnamon and figs in a large,

heavy-based saucepan.

Cook, stirring over medium heat for 10 minutes.

Increase heat and bring to the boil, for 4 minutes.

Remove from heat, remove cinnamon and stir in walnuts. Pour into prepared muffin pans and allow to set overnight in the fridge.

*Recipe courtesy of
Chelsea*



Traditionally marmalade was made
with quinces - the preserve takes
its name from the marmelo, the
Portuguese word for quince



Quince & ginger paste

Ingredients • 600g quinces

• 5cm piece fresh ginger • 3 cups water • 1½ cups caster sugar

Peel and core the quinces and

dice the flesh. Place the skin and cores in a pan over a moderate heat with the ginger and water. Once soft, strain and reserve the liquid. Add the diced fruit to the liquid and boil until soft, then purée. Add the sugar to the purée and return to the saucepan. Cook over a gentle heat until the quince turns ruby red. (This takes about three hours and you need to be vigilant, stirring often to stop it sticking and to keep an eye on the colour.) Spoon the mixture into a foil-lined tray and leave overnight to set. Slice, wrap in foil and keep it in the fridge.

Ray McVinnie's poached quinces

Ingredients • 3 quinces • 3½ cups water

• ½ cup sugar • cinnamon stick • lemon

Peel, core and slice quinces then simmer gently in water with sugar, cinnamon stick and a piece of lemon peel until tender. Cool, chill and serve over ricotta.

Quince jelly

Ingredients • 8 large quinces • 3kg sugar

• 3 litres water

Wash the quinces but leave whole. Place them in a pot with water and sugar and boil for 3½ hours. Lift out fruit carefully, eat hot or cold. Pour cooled jelly into jars and seal.



Spiced pear paste

This paste is perfect for a cheese platter before or after dinner. It's a particularly delicious accompaniment to blue cheese.

Ingredients • 1.2kg ripe pears • Juice of

2 large lemons • 1kg jam setting sugar

• ¼ teaspoon ground cloves • ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon

Line a 20cm square cake tin with plastic wrap. Peel pears. Remove cores. Weigh pear flesh – you will need 1kg of flesh. Place pears in a blender and process to a smooth puree.

Place puree, lemon juice, sugar, cloves and cinnamon in a large, wide, heavy-based saucepan. Cook, stirring, over medium heat until sugar dissolves. Increase heat and bring to a full rolling boil (a boil that cannot be stirred down). Boil, stirring occasionally, for 15 minutes or until mixture thickens to a paste and darkens in colour. Remove from heat and set aside for 5 minutes.

Pour mixture into prepared tin. Smooth surface. Set aside overnight at room temperature to allow mixture to set firmly. To serve, take paste out of tin and remove plastic. Cut into pieces.

You could also spoon paste mixture into plastic-lined muffin holes to create cute little rounds.

Paste will keep in the fridge, wrapped in plastic, for up to three months. *Recipe courtesy of Chelsea*

A jam is made with whole fruit and sugar, whereas jellies are made with strained fruit juice.

Spiced pears

Good bottling varieties

are 'Williams' Bon Chrétien', 'Packham' and 'Winter Nelis'. You could add cardamom and star anise to this syrup for more flavour, and substitute the lemon peel with orange or lime peel.

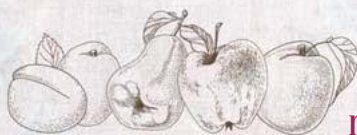
Ingredients • 6 pears • 1½ cups sugar
• 2 cinnamon sticks • 1 vanilla pod
• 2 pieces lemon peel • 5 whole cloves

Peel, core and halve pears. Cover with water and add remaining ingredients. Bring to the boil, then turn down the heat and simmer for 20 minutes. Heat jars in the oven at 100°C for 20 minutes and boil the seals. Carefully spoon hot pears and juice into hot jars and seal immediately.

Fig, ginger & honey jam

Ingredients • 500g fresh figs, trimmed and quartered • ¼ cup lemon juice • 1 teaspoon lemon zest • 1 tablespoon minced ginger • 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon • ¼ cup honey • ¾ cup sugar

Combine lemon juice, zest, ginger, spice, honey and sugar in a pot. Over a medium heat, stir until the sugar has dissolved and the honey melted. Add figs to pot. Bring to the boil and, stirring frequently, simmer until thick. Store this fresh fig jam in the fridge, as it has only about half the amount of sugar as a standard jam.



Peach & rosemary jam

This is based on a Martha Stewart recipe.

It's in the sweet section, because it's lovely on warm scones or mixed with Greek yoghurt as a pudding, but you can use it in marinades too, or try adding a twist or two of cracked pepper to give it some bite.

Ingredients • 1kg peaches, peeled, stoned and sliced • 4 cups sugar • ¼ cup lemon juice • 4 large sprigs of rosemary

Put peaches in a large bowl with sugar and rosemary. Toss to combine. Stand for a few hours, stirring each hour, until the sugar has dissolved. Bring to the boil in a large pot and cook until syrupy. Test for setting point, and discard the rosemary before pouring into jars. You can lightly mash the peaches, or leave them as is if you prefer chunky peach jam.

Peach pit & peel jelly

'Blackboy' peaches make a marvellous, dark jam but you will end up with a big pile of pits and fuzzy peels. Don't just chuck them away – place in a large pot, cover with water and simmer for an hour. Strain off the liquid, discard the pits and peels and boil to reduce the volume by half. Add an equal quantity of jam-setting sugar to make a delicious – and thrifty – purple peach jelly.



The key to successfully drying fruit is slow and steady.

You can dry most fruits in a dehydrator, or even a very low oven, but if you do it quickly the fruit will become tough; too slowly and it may rot. Soft fruits, like berries and stone fruit, contain more water than hard fruit, such as apples and pears, and so take longer to dry.

Quick & Easy **Orange Scented Plum Jam**

1kg fresh plums (about 10)

1kg **Chelsea Jam Setting Sugar**

2 Tbsp orange zest

1. Remove stones from plums and cut into small pieces or pulse in a food processor until finely chopped.
2. In a large, heavy based saucepan heat plums, Chelsea Jam Setting Sugar and orange zest over a low heat, stirring until sugar has dissolved.
3. Increase heat and bring to a full boil (a boil that cannot be stirred down). Boil rapidly for 4 minutes (removing any foam with a spoon).
4. Test for 'set': Put a small amount on a cold saucer, the surface should wrinkle when a spoon is pushed through it. If the surface doesn't wrinkle, return to the boil for 1-2 minute intervals and test again.
5. Spoon hot jam into warm sterilised jars and seal with lids. Refrigerate once opened.



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Gooseberry flan

NZ Gardener's Riverton

writer Robert Guyton says you're not a true Southlander unless you have a freezer full of gooseberries! Frozen fruit is fine for this flan.

Ingredients • 1 sheet sweet short pastry • 4 cups gooseberries • $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar • $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cinnamon • 1 tablespoon flour

Fit the pastry in a 23cm flan tin.

Chill in the fridge. Heat the oven to 200°C. Top and tail the gooseberries, rinse and dry. In a bowl, toss together the gooseberries, sugar, cinnamon and flour. Place gooseberries in the pastry case. Cook for 35-40 minutes. If pastry browns before the gooseberries are tender, reduce the heat to 160°C and cook until done.

Brought to you by

TATUA



Baking with jam & fruit

When your pantry shelves are groaning with bottled fruit and jam, why not make pies, puddings and cakes?



Síana's mum's scones

Síana is an Irish girl who helped out at NZ Gardener for several months. Her lasting legacy is this scone recipe, which she bought in one day and which is now the whole team's firm favourite.

Ingredients • 225g self-raising flour • 1 level teaspoon baking powder • 25g castor sugar • 50g butter or margarine • 1 egg • 5 tablespoons milk

Preheat the oven to 190°C/200°C. Mix the flour, baking powder and castor sugar together in a bowl. Rub in the butter until it resembles coarse breadcrumbs. Beat the egg and milk together, add to the flour mixture and mix to form a dough.

Turn onto a floury surface, shape into a rectangle and cut out 6-8 rounds. Put on baking tray and bake for 12-15 minutes.

Roly-poly jam pudding

Ingredients • 125g butter • 2 cups flour • 3 teaspoons baking powder • 1 cup milk • ½ cup of jam **Syrup** • ¾ cup sugar • ¾ cup boiling water • 75g melted butter

Preheat oven to 180°C. Lightly grease a 22cm x 9cm ovenproof dish. Rub the butter into the flour and baking powder until fine and crumbly and make a well. Add enough milk to make a soft dough.

Turn out onto a lightly floured surface. Roll out to 1cm, spread jam over the top to within 1cm of the edge. Roll up like a Swiss roll and place in the prepared dish.

Prepare the syrup by stirring together the sugar, water and butter and pour over the roll. Bake in preheated oven for 45-55 minutes until roll is golden and well risen.

Recipe courtesy of Chelsea



Light-as-air sponge

There's nothing like a sponge filled with whipped cream and homemade jam for turning an afternoon tea into something special.

This light chocolate sponge recipe comes from

Helensville's Jean Narbey, who has quite a pedigree as a home baker. Aged 104, Jean is the Helensville A&P Association's oldest member. She has been involved with the Helensville A&P Show for much of its 113 year history, as a contestant and later a food judge, and remembers well the cleaning, baking and (more fondly) after show dances of previous shows.

Jean always took this cake for "take a plate" special occasions. This year, this sponge was the set task for the test recipe class at the show.

Ingredients • 3 eggs • ¾ cup castor sugar • 1 dessertspoon golden syrup • ½ cup arrowroot (available in most supermarkets) • 1 teaspoon each of cocoa, cinnamon and mixed spice • ½ teaspoon each of cream tartar and baking soda • 2 heaped teaspoons flour

Preheat oven to 180°C. Grease a round, deep sponge sandwich tin and line with baking paper.

Separate egg whites from yolks. Beat whites to a stiff froth, then add yolks one at a time; followed by syrup and sugar. Lastly fold in with a metal spoon sifted arrowroot, cocoa, spices, cream of tartar, baking soda and flour.

Pour into the prepared sandwich tin. Cook until cake springs back when lightly touched. Leave in the tin for five minutes before turning onto wire racks.

Try sweetened mascarpone
as an indulgent alternative
to cream in scones



Warm sugar-roasted fruit

Ingredients

- 2 plums
- 2 slices fresh, peeled pineapple
- 2 peaches
- 2 nectarines
- 2-3 tablespoons dark cane sugar

Butterscotch-swirled yoghurt

- 2 cups thick natural yoghurt
- 1-2 tablespoons dark cane sugar

Wash and cut the plums, peaches and nectarines in half and remove the stones. Place all the fruit in a roasting dish and sprinkle with sugar. Place under a hot grill for approximately 5 minutes until the sugar bubbles and turns to caramel.

Serve warm with butterscotch-swirled yoghurt. Place yoghurt in a wide, shallow dish. Sprinkle with dark cane sugar, swirling the sugar loosely through the yoghurt (don't completely mix in). Cover and refrigerate for 1-2 hours. The sugar melts into the yoghurt and makes a lovely butterscotch swirl through it. For an extra crunchy topping, sprinkle the yoghurt with coffee sugar crystals.

Tip: You could try grilling other fruits, such as pears, feijoas and persimmons. This recipe can be a saviour for fruit not ripe enough or too past perfection to eat fresh.

Recipe courtesy of Chelsea



Pear & almond tart

The flavour and texture of this tart is even better when it has been stored for a couple of days. This recipe works

equally well with plums, apricots, peaches, blueberries and raspberries.

- Ingredients**
- 1 sheet shortcrust pastry
 - 100g butter
 - 60g castor sugar
 - 2 eggs
 - 80g ground almonds
 - zest of one lemon
 - 25g flour
 - 2 pears, quartered

Preheat oven to 180°C. Line a tart tin with pastry and blind bake until pale golden. Cream butter and sugar, add eggs one by one, then fold in ground almonds, lemon zest and flour. Spread into the tart base, then lay pears on top. Bake for 30 minutes until a skewer comes out clean. Allow to cool completely before serving.

Rich chocolate chilli cake

- Ingredients**
- 350g dark chocolate
 - 225g butter
 - ¼ teaspoon finely chopped red chilli
 - 1 cup sugar
 - ½ cup flour
 - 6 eggs

Preheat oven to 180°C. Melt chocolate and butter over a low heat, add chilli, cool. Beat sugar, flour and eggs until fluffy. Add chocolate mix. Pour into lined cake tin and bake for about 30 minutes. Allow to cool and serve with cream.

You can store apples and pears whole in a cool spot too

Although pick varieties suitable for long-term storage if you want to do so. Good apples to store include 'Tydeman's Late Orange' and 'Sturmer' and good pears are 'Winter Cole' and 'Winter Nelis'.

The storage area needs to be cool and dry with good air flow.



Feijoa & coconut tea bread

This tea loaf couldn't be easier – just bung all the ingredients in a bowl.

Ingredients • 220g flour, sifted • 200g soft brown sugar • 100g castor sugar • 250g mashed feijoas, drained (or use frozen) • 125ml grapeseed oil • 75ml coconut milk • 1 teaspoon bicarbonate soda • pinch salt • pinch cinnamon • 50g desiccated coconut

Preheat the oven to 170°C. Grease and line a loaf tin. Mix together all of the ingredients until just combined, then pour into the tin and bake for about an hour or until an inserted skewer comes out clean. Remove from the oven and allow to settle in the tin for five minutes before transferring to a wire rack to cool completely. Store in an airtight container.

Strawberry shortbread slice

Make a shortbread mix, then add fruit to the middle to make a slice. It's so easy – and one piece is never enough.

Ingredients • 500g softened butter • 500g plain flour • 250g castor sugar • 250g arrowroot or cornflour

For the filling • 2 cups frozen strawberries • ½ cup sugar • knob of butter • 3 teaspoons cornflour

To make shortbread, mix the ingredients in a bowl until a soft dough forms. Without overworking, roll it to 1cm thick. Line the base of a tin with greaseproof paper and spread out half the dough.

To make the filling, thaw the strawberries in a pot. Add the rest of the ingredients and cook until a reasonably thick sauce forms.

Spread the filling onto the dough, then place the other half of the dough over the top in pieces (so you can see the fruit showing through). Brush with a little milk and sprinkle with sugar. Bake in a 180°C oven until just turning golden brown around the edges. Allow to cool before dusting with icing sugar and serving with whipped cream.

Fruit spongy puds

Ingredients • 1 cup stewed, chopped fruit, such as peaches or pears • 4 tablespoons jam • 50g butter • 1 egg • ¼ cup sugar • 1 cup self-raising flour • ½ cup low-fat milk

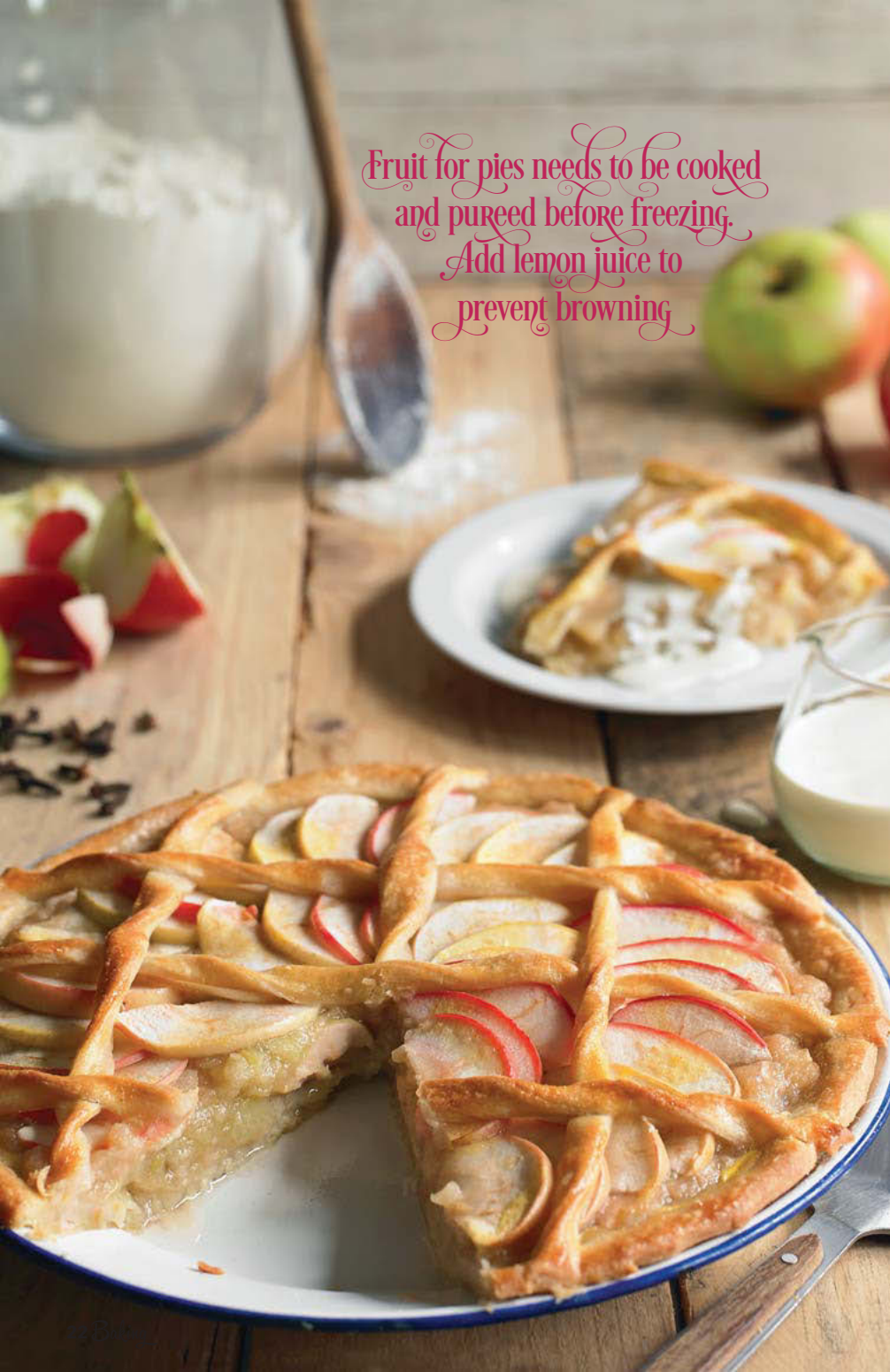
Spray four straight-sided coffee mugs

with non-stick baking spray. Divide the chopped fruit equally between the mugs. Spoon a tablespoon of jam over the fruit. Place the butter in a medium-sized microwave proof bowl. Melt on high power for 30-40 seconds. Beat in the egg and castor sugar then mix in the flour and milk. Spoon the mixture over the fruit and jam. Place all four mugs in the microwave and cook together on high for 3½-4 minutes. Rest the puddings for 2-3 minutes in the mugs then tip out onto individual plates. Serve with fruit yoghurt, mascarpone, whipped cream or ice-cream.

Recipe courtesy of Chelsea



Fruit for pies needs to be cooked
and pureed before freezing.
Add lemon juice to
prevent browning



Lattice-topped apple tart

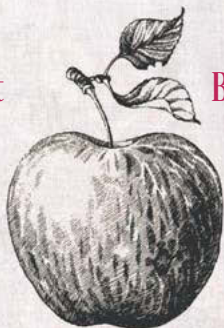
This is a family favourite of NZ *Gardener's* editorial assistant Barbara Smith. She says it's a great way to use up jars of stewed fruit. The same recipe works for apricots, pears and even rhubarb.

Ingredients • 2 sheets ready-rolled flaky pastry • 2 cups stewed apple, well drained and sweetened to taste • 3 apples • juice of one lemon • 2 tablespoons castor sugar • ¼ cup apricot or plum jam • 2 tablespoons water

Cut one sheet of pastry in half. Lightly moisten one edge with water, overlap one edge of the other sheet and roll with a rolling pin to join the sheets together. Roll to fit a greased 25cm pie plate or flan tin. Cut the remaining pastry into 1.5cm strips. Chill pastry case while preparing other ingredients.

Preheat oven to 200°C. Core but don't peel the apples. Slice finely and toss with lemon juice and castor sugar. Line pastry case with stewed apple. Top with apple slices in a decorative pattern and make a lattice with the pastry strips. Twist the strips and hold in place with a dab of water. Bake until pastry is golden brown. Watch carefully as cooking times vary. Reduce heat to 160°C and cook until the apples are tender. Make a glaze by melting the jam and water together in the microwave.

Brush glaze over the tart while it is still warm. Delicious served with cream, ice-cream or yoghurt.



Butterscotch apple sponge

Ingredients • 3 cups chunky stewed apple, not too wet • 2 tablespoons soft brown sugar • 1 teaspoon caramel essence (or vanilla) • 3 eggs • ¾ cup castor sugar • 6 tablespoons self-raising flour, sifted

Preheat oven to 180°C. Grease four to six individual ramekins. Place apples in ramekins, sprinkle with brown sugar and caramel essence, stirring to mix through. Beat eggs, adding castor sugar slowly until thick and creamy. Gently fold in flour. Pour sponge mixture over apples. Bake for 30-35 minutes and serve with cream. Peaches, plums, apricots or berries can be substituted in this versatile pudding and you can also flavour it with cinnamon, vanilla essence or nutmeg. *Recipe courtesy of Chelsea*

Pumpkin & pear crumble

Ingredients • 2 large, semi-firm pears, peeled and sliced • 1 cup cooked, cubed pumpkin • 1 tablespoon cornflour • 1 cup orange juice • 100g flour • 50g butter • 50g brown sugar • 40g oats • 40g coconut

Preheat oven to 180°C. Lay pear slices in a greased baking dish with pumpkin. Mix cornflour and juice and pour over the fruit. Mix flour, butter and sugar to form

crumble, then add oats and coconut. Spread over fruit and bake until golden and bubbling. Serve with ice-cream.


Don't add water to defrosted fruit when you cook it - there's more than enough in it already

Toasted plum brioche sandwiches with crème fraîche

Buy a loaf of brioche for this recipe – the rich sweetness of the egg-based bread adds a decadent edge to this jammy French toast. But at a pinch whatever bread you may have in the pantry or freezer would work fine.

Thaw 1 cup of frozen plums in a bowl overnight. Drain the juice into a small pot. Remove the stones, pull off the flesh and add to this pot of juice. Add 3 tablespoons sugar and a pinch of cinnamon. Cook gently until the plums soften and the sauce is reduced to thin syrup. Set aside.

Cut the bread into 2cm-slices. Beat an egg with ½ cup milk, 1 tablespoon sugar and a pinch of nutmeg, then dunk slices of brioche into it. In a frying pan, melt a knob of butter with a dash of vegetable oil, then add a slice of brioche. Spread with a large spoonful of the plum sauce and top with a second slice of brioche. Wait for the bottom to brown, then carefully turn over the sandwich and brown the other side. Plum juice will ooze out the sides and caramelize as it cooks.

Place the sandwiches on warmed plates, dust heavily with icing sugar and top with a dollop of crème fraîche and a sprinkle of grated lemon zest.



Self-saucing mixed berry pudding

This is sure to become a family favourite with its delicious mix of berries and orange. Be sure to keep frozen berries on hand so that you can whip this up anytime.

Ingredients • 1½ cups self-raising flour • 75g butter • ½ cup sugar • grated rind of 1 medium-sized orange • 1 cup milk • 1 cup mixed berries, fresh or frozen (defrosted) • icing sugar
Sauce • Boiling water (enough to make up to 1¼ cups) • juice of 1 medium orange • ½ cup berry or plum jam • 1 cup sugar

Preheat oven to 180°C. Lightly grease a 22cm x 9cm ovenproof dish. Sift flour into a bowl. Rub in butter until the mixture resembles fine crumbs. Stir in the sugar and orange rind and make a well in the centre. Pour in the milk, add the blueberries and mix with a slotted spoon to form a stiff batter. Spread batter into prepared dish.

To make the sauce, Make orange juice up to 1¼ cups with boiling water. Stir in the berry or plum jam and sugar, pour over batter. Bake in the preheated oven for 45 minutes or until the sponge top is cooked in the centre.

Recipe courtesy of Chelsea

It's easier to use up frozen fruit if it's been packed well.

Sort the fruit into suitably-sized portions and place in sturdy freezer bags – these are thinner and don't catch like zip-lock bags, so you're less likely to end up with the bottom of your freezer covered in escapees. Label the bags with the date and type of fruit.



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Pickling basics

Savoury preserves, such as pickles, chutneys and relishes, use vinegar alone, or a mix of vinegar and salt (and sometimes sugar) to preserve veges and fruit.

Salt: Acts as a preservative, but is also used as a flavour enhancer and to remove excess water from veges.

Vinegar: This also has a preservative action – or rather acetic acid, its active ingredient, does. When vinegar is the only preserving agent in a recipe, use one that contains at least 5 per cent acetic acid. This will kill any bacteria in the mixture.

Pickling spices: Tie whole spices in a muslin bag, so you can remove it once the preserve is cooked. Buy ready-made spice blends, or make your own by mixing equal quantities of cinnamon stick and mace blades, and whole cloves, allspice and peppercorns.





Savoury preserves

Preserve your excess autumn vegetables as sweet-sour pickles, chutneys and relishes that will fill your pantry, and add piquancy, flavour and bite to your meals



Apple, ginger & roasted beetroot relish

Ingredients • 4 large beetroot • 1 small onion
• 1 thumb-sized piece fresh ginger • 2 large apples (such as 'Peasgood Nonsuch') • 2 cups cider vinegar • 1 teaspoon wholegrain mustard • 1½ cups brown sugar

Halve the beetroot, place on tin foil, drizzle with a little olive oil and roast in a 150°C oven until tender. Cool and dice into 1cm cubes. Meanwhile peel and slice onion, grate ginger, and peel, core and dice apples, then sauté the onions, ginger and apple in a knob of butter in a large pot until the onions are soft and clear (about five minutes). Add cider vinegar, mustard, sugar and 1 cup of water. Bring to the boil then remove from the heat and stir through the beetroot. Pour into sterilised jars and seal immediately. Leave for a couple of weeks before serving.

Bottled beetroot

NZ Gardener's editor at large Lynda Hallinan ran a beetroot trial a couple of years ago, and picked the best varieties for bottling. She rates 'Detroit Dark Red' if you want big rounds for burgers, narrow 'Cylindra' if you want smaller slices for sandwiches, or miniature 'Bonny Baby' if you want to preserve whole baby beets.

Preserving beetroot is easy. Boil unpeeled beets till tender and rub off the skins under the tap. Slice into jars (or pack in whole if using baby beets). Bring 1 cup water, 2 cups malt vinegar, 1 teaspoon salt and 1 cup brown sugar to the boil (use less sugar if you prefer it less sweet). Pour pickling liquid over beets and seal.



Courgette chutney

This recipe uses a fair number of courgettes (yay!) plus it pairs well with grilled meat, so it's a great gift to take along to a barbecue.

Ingredients • 10 courgettes
• 5 red capsicums • 3 medium onions
• 4 tablespoons salt • 2 cups sugar
• 1 tablespoon ground turmeric
• 1 tablespoon cornflour • 2½ cups white wine vinegar • 1 tablespoon wholegrain mustard • 1 small finely chopped chilli (optional) • Grated zest of one lemon

Grate courgettes and then mix with diced capsicums. Finely dice onions and add to the bowl along with salt. Mix well, cover and leave overnight. Rinse well, then drain and add to a large pot with sugar, turmeric, cornflour, white wine vinegar, wholegrain mustard, chopped chilli (leave this out if you don't like it hot) and lemon zest. Bring to the boil, then turn down and simmer for 30 minutes. Spoon into sterilised jars and seal.

Carrot relish

This is a fresh relish so store in the fridge and eat within a day or two. It's great on the side with curry or stirred through rice.

Ingredients • ¼ cup sultanas
• ½ small onion • 1 cup raw grated carrot
• chopped coriander • roasted cashews
• salt and freshly ground black pepper

Cook sultanas in water until soft. Drain and allow to cool slightly. Sauté onion in butter until clear and soft, then stir through the sultanas. Add carrot, salt, pepper, coriander and cashews.

A glass jar filled with a chunky, vibrant red relish sits on a dark, textured plate. A silver spoon is partially submerged in the relish. To the right of the jar is a stack of three slices of rustic, golden-brown bread. In the foreground, a single cracker is topped with a generous dollop of the red relish. The background is a dark, weathered wooden surface, and a portion of a bright pink knitted cloth is visible on the right side.

Sealed jars of relish have
a shelf life of up to a year
and pickles and chutneys
last up to two.

Rosemary & garlic infused oil

Making infused oils with oily, woody herbs such as rosemary (or tarragon or sage) is easy; you simply infuse the oil in the pan. You can use them straight away without even bottling them, but bottled oils look nice and make a great gift. Add strips of lemon zest, peppercorns, bay leaves and other woody herbs to make them look pretty. Don't try to infuse oil with soft-leaf herbs such as basil or oregano as they won't keep in the oil safely – they are too moisture-dense and will go mouldy.

Over a low heat, warm 250ml extra virgin olive oil in a wide, deep saucepan. Add 4 peeled, whole garlic cloves and a few washed and dried rosemary sprigs. Warm gently for five minutes, then use a slotted spoon to transfer the garlic and rosemary into a sterilised, dry bottle or jar. Pour over the oil, making sure that it reaches the top of the bottle and completely covers the rosemary. Seal.

Tarragon vinegar

Thoroughly wash a few sprigs of fresh French tarragon and pat them dry with kitchen paper. Pop them into a sterilised, dry bottle, then fill with a good-quality white wine vinegar. Seal and leave to steep for a couple of weeks to allow the flavours to develop before using.



Mild American mustard

Mustard is normally grown for its edible leaves but if your crop has bolted in the late summer heat, the seed is of course edible too.

In a small bowl (not aluminium), soak ½ cup yellow mustard seeds in 1 cup water and 100ml white vinegar overnight. Purée in a blender or food processor until smooth (add extra water if required). Place in a small pot with ½ teaspoon salt, a pinch of garlic powder, a pinch of paprika and 1 teaspoon ground turmeric. Bring to the boil, whisking constantly, then reduce heat and simmer for a few minutes, until thick. Store in the fridge.

Beer & honey mustard

Combine 100g yellow mustard seeds and 100g black or brown mustard seeds and soak overnight in 1 cup of beer (feel free to use wine or vinegar instead). The next day, set aside half the soaked mustard seeds and purée the rest with 100ml runny honey, 2 tablespoons good-quality olive oil, 1 tablespoon white vinegar, and 1 teaspoon salt. Scrape out of blender into a bowl and stir in reserved whole mustard seeds. You can also add finely chopped (preferably minced) fresh herbs such as thyme and rosemary, or deseeded chilli and citrus peel.

The difference between pickles, chutneys and relishes

In basic terms pickles are veges preserved in vinegar; chutneys (the Western version of them at least) are a cooked sweet-sour vege (and possibly fruit) pickle; and relishes a cooked sour vege pickle.



Butter chicken sauce

A favourite of editor Jo McCarroll from the *NZ Gardener* recipe archives. "It's great with chicken, fish, veges and lamb," she says. "Just place meat or veges in a dish, cover with sauce and tinfoil, then bake at 160°C for an hour. It freezes well too, although if you are freezing it, leave out the cream and add once defrosted."

Ingredients • 50g butter • 3 cloves garlic • 1 large onion • 1 large thumb fresh ginger • ¼ teaspoon fresh red chilli • ¼ teaspoon ground cloves • ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon • 1 tablespoon garam masala • ½ teaspoon turmeric • 1 teaspoon ground cardamom • 1 chicken or vegetable stock cube • 700g fresh red tomatoes • 100g ground almonds • 100ml thick cream • 1 bunch of fresh coriander • salt and pepper to taste

Dice the garlic and onion, grate the ginger, chop the chilli and sweat them gently, along with the spices, in a knob of butter for 5 minutes. Don't allow the onion to caramelise. Add the stock cube and stir until combined, then add the skinned, deseeded and chopped tomatoes and almonds and simmer slowly for 20 minutes. Remove from the heat and when cool enough to handle blend in a food processor until smooth. Add the cream and chopped coriander, then return to the heat. Don't allow to boil or the sauce may split. Decant into containers and allow to cool completely before freezing.

Tomato & chilli jam

Ingredients • 100g butter • 3 small onions • 2 green or red chillies • 500g tomatoes • 100ml malt vinegar • 300g sugar • salt and pepper to taste

Melt the butter in a pan. Add the sliced onions, chopped chillies (remove the seeds if you prefer less heat) and chopped tomatoes, then simmer gently for 30 minutes until the tomatoes have cooked down and the onions are soft and sticky. Add the vinegar and sugar, and reduce the jam by a quarter; the finished result should be glassy and sticky like fruit jam. Add salt and pepper, then pour into sterilised jars.

Digby Law's plum sauce

Count and write down the number of plums you have before you start so you know how many stones to fish out!

Ingredients • 3kg plums • 3 cloves garlic • 2 onions • 1.5kg sugar • 6 cups malt vinegar • 2 tablespoons salt • 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper • 2 teaspoons ground cloves • 2 teaspoons ground ginger • 2 teaspoons ground black pepper

Coarsely chop the onions and crush the garlic. Combine all of the ingredients in a large saucepan and bring to the boil. Cook slowly, uncovered, until the onions are soft. Push the sauce through a sieve, or remove and discard the plum stones, and purée in batches in a food processor. Reheat the sauce to blend, pour into hot, clean bottles and seal. The flavour should improve over time.





Cooking tomatoes
enhances their nutritional value,
and boosts their cancer-fighting ability

Passata

Passata is skinned and pulped tomatoes pasteurised for a longer shelf life. This recipe includes herbs and onions so gives you a fast sauce for pasta, pizza or meat. Use really ripe tomatoes.



Harvest tomato sauce

This is an Annabel Langbein

recipe that both *Get Growing* editor Rachel Oldham and *NZ Gardener's* editor Jo McCarroll adore. It's great stirred in pasta, spread on pizza or served alongside bread and cheese.

Ingredients • 5 tablespoons olive oil
• 1 large onion • 2 cloves garlic • 2 sticks celery • 3kg tomatoes • 20 fresh basil leaves • 4 sprigs fresh oregano • sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Dice the onion and chop the garlic and celery and then sweat them together in the oil over a moderate heat until clear. Add the skinned and chopped tomatoes and remove from the heat as soon as the mixture begins to bubble. Stir in the ripped basil leaves and de-stalked oregano, season to taste, then pour into sterilised jars and seal.

Green tomato relish

Ingredients • 1.5kg green tomatoes
• 2 onions • 1 tablespoon mustard seeds
• 125ml white wine vinegar • 150g sugar
• 2 teaspoons wholegrain mustard
• 1 pinch of nutmeg • salt and pepper
• 2 tablespoons cornflour

Slice the onions and tomatoes. Put all ingredients in a pot and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for about 30 minutes. Mix the cornflour with a little water, add to the mixture and stir until thickened. Decant into sterilised jars.

Ingredients • 1.5kg tomatoes, cored and cut into wedges • 2 red capsicums, deseeded and cut into eighths • 1 large onion, cut into wedges • 4 cloves garlic, peeled • 1 teaspoon rosemary, chopped • 1 chilli, seeded and chopped • ¼ cup tomato paste • 2 tablespoons sugar
• 2 tablespoons olive oil • 1 teaspoon salt
• ground black pepper

Preheat oven to 160°C. Put tomatoes, capsicums and onion in a large roasting dish lined with baking paper in a single layer so they roast and caramelise rather than stew. Add the garlic, rosemary and chilli. Mix together tomato paste, sugar, olive oil, salt and pepper. Spoon this over the veges and stir. Bake for about 2 hours. Cool then purée in a food processor. This can be frozen or bring the sauce to the boil, pour into sterilised jars and seal.

Aunt Daisy's red tomato sauce

Ingredients • 5.4kg ripe tomatoes, washed and cut up • 1.4kg brown sugar
• 3 cups vinegar • 80g allspice • 80g salt

Tie spices up in a muslin bag, then put all ingredients in a pan and boil for 3 hours, stirring often. Sieve, bottle and seal.

For tomato sauce, use low-acid tomatoes like 'Roma', which have meatier flesh and less pulp

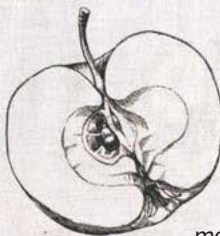
Herb jellies

This recipe is adapted from

Alexa Johnston's excellent collection of preserving recipes, *Ladies, A Plate: Jams & Preserves*. These are simply apple jellies made somewhat tart by the addition of cider vinegar and with finely chopped herbs suspended in them. Alexa suggests, if you have access to them, using windfall apples for the jelly and adding the core and peelings of a couple of quinces to ramp up the pectin level – although she also says the quince turned her rosemary jelly from green to pink! You can use pretty much any woody herb – Alexa suggests rosemary, sage, mint and tarragon, but you could also try parsley or lemon verbena.

Ingredients • 900g cooking apples
• large bunch of rosemary, sage, mint, tarragon, parsley or lemon verbena
• 3 cups cold water • ½ cup white wine vinegar • white sugar • ½ cup extra herb leaves, very finely chopped

Roughly chop the apples, skin, cores and all. Put the chopped apples in a large preserving pan with the herb of your choice, water and vinegar. Cover the pan and bring the mixture to the boil, then cook it gently until the apples are very soft and pulpy (about 20 minutes).



Ladle the juice and pulp into a jelly bag, hang over a bowl and leave to drain overnight. Resist squeezing the bag to extract more juice – doing so will make your jelly cloudy rather than clear.

The next day, measure the drained liquid in the bowl and allow 200g sugar for each 250ml juice.

Warm the sugar for a few minutes on a tray in the oven. Tip the juice into a preserving pan, turn on the heat, add the warmed sugar and stir with a wooden spoon until the sugar dissolves.

Turn up the heat and bring the mixture to a rapid boil, watching it like a hawk to make sure it doesn't boil over. Adjust the heat if this seems likely, but a quick boil means a better-flavoured jelly.

Start testing for a set after five minutes – it can take anywhere from 5 to 15 minutes to reach setting point. When the jelly has reached setting point, turn off the heat, and let it sit. When the jelly has thickened enough to keep the chopped herbs suspended (it can take up to 10 minutes), skim any froth from the top, stir through the extra-finely chopped herbs of your choice, ladle the jelly into a heatproof jug and pour it carefully into hot sterilised jars. Seal the jars immediately and try not to move them until the jelly is cold and set. Label and store in a cool, dark place.



Jellies are best made with fruit high in pectin and acid.

Apples, crabapples, citrus and currants are all good. You can use other fruits, or flavour them with herbs or flowers, but you're best to use those things combined with something high in acid and pectin.

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Orchard basics

Fruit trees are a long-term project: if you prepare the soil, get the right variety and treat it well, some trees will continue to bear fruit for decades. Do your research before you plant a thing.

When: The best time to start your orchard was 10 years ago! Failing that, fruit trees are best planted in autumn and winter. That's also when garden centres have the greatest variety of stock as bare-root trees.

Where: Almost without exception, fruit trees need a spot that offers at least four hours of direct sun each day. Most do best with free-draining soil and appreciate shelter from strong winds.

What: Ask around and find out which varieties do well locally. Consider when things will ripen too – ideally you'll want to spread your harvest across the whole year.



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Starting an orchard

Autumn is tree-planting time!
This month why not start or add
to your home orchard so you can
harvest fresh fruit all year long



Getting ready

Site and soil preparation is

critical for successful fruit trees. Before you de-pot or de-bag your tree – even before you buy it! – dig a hole that's as deep as the root ball and two to three times as wide. You want it to be wide enough so you don't have to bend any roots back on themselves, and deep enough so the tree is sitting at the same depth of soil as it was in the bag or pot.

With clay soil, score the sides of the hole so that the roots of your new tree can more easily penetrate the densely packed soil particles. This also helps water to drain more easily through heavy soil, otherwise your planting hole can fill up with water like a bucket, putting your new tree at risk of drowning.

Work aged compost into the base of the hole and the soil you dug out which you are going to use to back-fill. This organic matter around the rootball will give your tree a ready source of energy as it gets established, and will help retain water in the soil around the root zone. Don't use fresh manure or compost though as it might burn the roots.

If you are planting a bare-root tree, build up a mound of soil at the bottom of the hole and place the roots on the mound pointing down. This helps avoid air pockets around the roots, which may impede your tree's progress.



Plant preparation

Once the hole is ready, prepare

the plant itself. Soak the whole bag or pot in a bucket of water, dilute comfrey tea or seaweed tonic for up to half an hour until there are no bubbles rising from the potting mix and the root ball is fully saturated. This keeps the plant hydrated during the transplant process, reduces transplant shock and helps the plant get established: basically, once the tree is in the soil, water will not move from the soil to the root ball unless there is sufficient water in the potting mix to attract the soil particles and build a capillary path to draw it in.

Once you have the site and plant ready, de-bag or de-pot your tree. Dormant plants cope with root disturbance better, but as a rule, try to avoid disturbing the root ball as much as possible, and leave roots exposed to air for as little time as you can.

Once the plant is in position gently backfill the hole with your soil/compost mix, firm it in and water well. Keep filling, firming and watering until the tree is planted to the same depth, or slightly above, as it was in the bag or pot (with grafted trees, be sure the bud union, or graft, is well clear of the soil). If the plant needs a stake for support this is best positioned before backfilling to prevent root injury.

Want to grow a fruit tree that's marginal in your region?

Plant it in spring rather than in autumn or winter, so that the tree has time to become well-established before the cold weather hits. Well-ripened growth is more hardy, even on tender species, and will be better equipped to handle any frosts.



It can take up to four weeks before
new roots emerge from the original
root ball to sustain a newly planted
tree from the surrounding soil



There's a whole range of
dwarf fruit trees that have
been bred to succeed in pots,
but any variety of fig,
feijoa, blueberry or olive
should do well in
a container

Fruit trees in pots

You can grow fresh fruit and berries in pocket-handkerchief-sized gardens – in fact, there are options for balconies and renters too. In fact, for gardeners restricted to pots, there are plenty of fruiting plants worth growing. But once again, success depends on picking the right varieties, using the right container and growing medium, and maintaining the right feeding and watering regime.

With apples, peaches and nectarines, most will do best in the earth, but you can still grow them in containers – just look for the dwarf-varieties that have been bred to suit the contained lifestyle – your garden centre should have a range in stock. If you are not sure, check what rootstock the tree has been grafted onto; the rootstock should be printed beside the cultivar name on the plant's label (as in, 'Teacher's Pet', M116 for the dwarf apple 'Teacher's Pet').

Almost any citrus will do well in pots, although in really tight spots look for lemon, lime, tangelo, orange and even grapefruit varieties grafted onto dwarf Flying Dragon rootstock. With containers that are half-wine-barrel sized or bigger you can get away with citrus grafted on the more usual trifoliata rootstock, although it is fairly vigorous so you might need to prune the roots every few years.

Growing citrus in pots also allows growers down south (where some types of this fruit might be marginal) to get a crop – the temperature of the soil in pots is always a degree or two warmer than the ground;



plus you can trundle your pot into a hothouse or a sheltered spot before the cold weather comes. Southern growers can try subtropical fruits, like guavas, feijoa (look out for the dwarf variety 'Bambina') and mountain pawpaw in decent-sized containers too. If you plan on moving your pot seasonally, though, consider starting with a plastic pot, as clay pots become extremely heavy when planted out.

Almost all berries perform well in pots, and keeping them in containers makes it easier to protect these sweet fruits from birds. Figs do well in pots too, although keep the water up (in the ground figs send roots deep down into the soil, which they cannot do in containers) and prune them to a compact size to reduce water loss through transpiration.

Whatever you are growing, the right growing medium is absolutely key to success with container grown fruit. It's worth investing in a commercially produced potting mix to avoid any problems with drainage or disease that might occur if you use garden soil. In smaller containers, consider working in water-retaining crystals to the potting mix before you plant; be aware that the soil in pots dries out far quicker than the soil in garden beds. Water fruit trees in pots deeply and regularly, particularly when the weather is hot, and mulch with peastraw or compost to help with

moisture retention. Apply a slow-release fertiliser as directed, and give plants a regular boost with worm tea.

**Plant in a big enough pot that
the soil will hold enough water
to sustain fruit production**

Fruiting calendar



FRUIT	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN
Apples						
Apricots						
Avocado						
Blackberry						
Boysenberry						
Cherries						
Chilean Guava						
Crabapples						
Currants						
Feijoas						
Figs						
Gooseberries						
Grapefruit						
Kiwifruit						
Lemons						
Limes						
Mandarins						
Nashi Pears						
Nectarines						
Oranges						
Passionfruit						
Peaches						
Pears						
Persimmons						
Plums						
Quinces						
Raspberries						
Tamarillos						
Tangelos						

Before you plant, think about when each crop will ripen. Ideally you want to spread your fruit harvests over months, or even across the whole year. Many fruit trees have early-, mid- and late-ripening varieties too (see over the page).

JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	FRUIT
						Apples
						Apricots
						Avocado
						Blackberry
						Boysenberry
						Cherries
						Chilean Guava
						Crabapples
						Currants
						Feijoas
						Figs
						Gooseberries
						Grapefruit
						Kiwifruit
						Lemons
						Limes
						Mandarins
						Nashi Pears
						Nectarines
						Oranges
						Passionfruit
						Peaches
						Pears
						Persimmons
						Plums
						Quinces
						Raspberries
						Tamarillos
						Tangelos

Fruit variety guide by region

There are three main growing areas with distinct climates in New Zealand. This page recommends varieties suitable for the different regional conditions:

Northern. Semi-subtropical.

Humid and warm. Few frosts during winter.

Mid Temperate. Frosts during winter. Warm summers.

Southern Temperate. Regular frosts and possible snow in winter and spring. Warm summers. Cool autumns.



Apples. **Northern:** 'Baujade', 'Egremont Russet', 'Freyberg', 'Fuji', 'Granny Smith', 'Kidd's Orange Red', 'Oratia Beauty', 'Peasgood Nonsuch', 'Tydeman's Late Orange', 'Winter Banana', 'Worcester Pearmain'. **Mid and Southern:** Rezista and heritage varieties: 'Baujade', 'Prima', 'Priscilla', 'Peasgood Nonsuch', 'Monty's Surprise'.

Apricots. **Northern:** Low-chill varieties: 'Katy Cot', 'Royal Rosa', 'Trevatt'.

Mid and Southern: 'Moorpark', 'Trevatt', 'Royal Rosa'; dwarf varieties: 'Aprigold', 'Golden Glow'.

Blackberry. **All areas:** 'Black Satin'.

Boysenberry. **All areas:** 'Brulee'.

Cherries. **Northern:** 'Lapins'. **Mid and Southern:** 'Stella', 'Lapins'.

Chilean Guava. **All areas:** All varieties.

Citrus. **Northern:** All varieties. **Mid:** All varieties but less hardy types like limes need to be protected from frost.

Southern: Hardier varieties like Lemons 'Meyer', Grapefruit 'Golden Special' and Mandarin 'Miho'. Grow others in pots.

Currants. All areas but expect less fruit in warmer areas. 'Sefton' best for north.

Feijoas. **Northern and Mid:** 'Apollo', 'Wiki Tu'. **Southern:** 'Unique', 'Pounamu'.

Figs. **Northern & mid:** All varieties.

Southern: 'Brown Turkey', 'Brunswick'.

Gooseberries do better in mid and south but can be grown where there is frost in the north. 'Invicta' best for north.

Kiwifruit prefers a warm temperate, is fairly frost-tolerant but late frosts can damage or kill young buds.

Nashi. **All areas:** 'Hosui', 'Nijiseiki'.

Nectarines. **Northern:** 'Fantasia', 'Snow Queen'. **Mid and Southern:** 'Fantasia', 'Queen Giant', 'Red Gold', 'Theo Ching'.

Passionfruit like warm climates and are relatively frost-tender so only grow in favourable microclimates in the south.

Peaches. **Northern:** 'Blackboy', 'Golden Queen', 'Redhaven', 'Wiggins'. **Mid and Southern:** 'April White', 'Blackboy', 'Gordon's Glory', 'Red Haven'.

Pears. **Northern:** 'Winter Cole'. **Mid and Southern:** 'Beurre Bosc', 'Packham's Triumph', 'Taylor's Gold'.

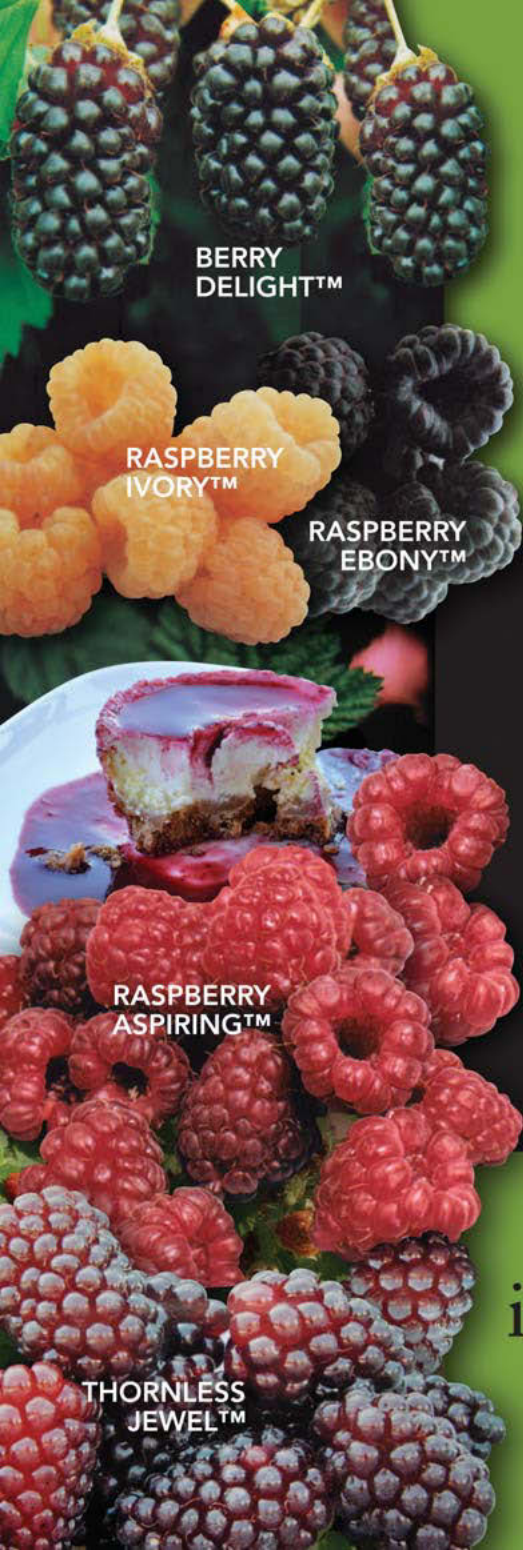
Persimmons. **All areas:** 'Fuyu'.

Plums. **Northern:** 'Burbank', 'Damson', 'Duff's Early Jewel', 'Elephant Heart', 'Purple King', 'Santa Rosa', 'Satsuma', 'Torwick'. **Mid and Southern:** 'Elephant Heart', 'Black Doris', 'Burbank', 'Omega', 'Santa Rosa'. Prune plums: 'Italian', 'Stanley'.

Quinces. **All areas:** 'Smyrna', 'Van Deman'.

Raspberry. **All areas.** 'Aspiring', 'Ebony', 'Ivory', 'Waiau'.

Tamarillos. Frost-tender so only grow in favourable microclimates in the south.



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Preserving tips

As with any cooking, practice makes perfect when it comes to preserves, but there a few simple and sensible rules worth following

Equipment

Glass jars are readily available from charity and antique shops, kitchen stores, supermarkets, online or even garden centres. The cheapest sort, of course, are family hand-me-downs and you can reuse jars from store-bought jams or pickles. Check carefully for chips and cracks, which may cause them to explode during sterilisation and can affect the seal.

Lids are less suited for reuse because the rubber seals may have been corroded by vinegar in the original product. The team at *NZ Gardener*, however, frequently reuses metal lids and we're all still here to tell the tale. Lids too should be scrupulously sterilised.

Cellophane covers and rubber bands are the old-style method of sealing high sugar-content jams and jellies. They do look charming, especially for gifts, but they aren't as effective at keeping out air once the jar has been opened.

Use a large, heavy-bottomed preserving pan, preferably made from stainless-steel or enamel. Again, countryside op shops can be a great source. (Aluminium pots are a no-no as the acid will react with the metal.) Whichever pot you use, it has to be big enough so jam doesn't overflow at a full rolling boil. A pair of clean preserving tongs can be very useful for lifting jars out of hot water or the oven and are probably more sterile than a folded teatowel!



Sterilising

A warning: all your hard-won efforts may come to naught if you don't sterilise and seal your jars correctly. Skimping on these steps could lead to your preserves growing mould or, at worst, making

you or any other consumers of your edibles very ill indeed. Use your common sense and if in doubt, chuck it out!

However you source your jar and lids, they must be sterilised in one of the three following ways: washed in very hot, soapy water, rinsed then dried on racks in a low (100°C) oven; immersed in a large pot of water – a pasta pot with built-in strainer is ideal – and brought to the boil, then lifted out and allowed to dry; or put through a hot dishwasher cycle – though perhaps not if your machine is gunked-up! Whatever method you choose, do it immediately before the jars will be used and be sure they are dry before you fill them. Hot preserves should only be poured into warm jars or you run the risk of the glass jars shattering.

Water bath vs overflow method

The overflow method is suitable for bottling fruit. Gently stew fruit until soft but not mushy in sugar syrup: light sugar syrup is 1:3 sugar to water, a sweet one would be 1:1. Using a slotted spoon, fill sterilised jars with fruit to just shy of the top, and cover with boiling syrup until full

to overflowing. Run a knife around the inside edge of the jar to remove any air bubbles, make sure the fruit is fully submersed and wipe the rim clean, then screw on the lid. The dome will pop in when the seal forms.

The water bath method can be used for bottling fruit (and veges and sauces). You'll need wide-necked jars, flat metal lids and screw bands. Pack stewed or raw fruit into the jar, cover with syrup or liquid to 1cm below the rim, place the lid on top and loosely screw on the bands. Place the jars on a rack in a deep pot, fill with water to 3cm above the tops of the jars, bring to a boil then simmer for the time required for the size of the jar and the type of fruit (this can vary greatly from minutes to more than an hour). Remove from pan, screw lids on tightly and leave to cool. Again the lids should make a pop sound and appear concave when the seal forms.

Freezing

Veges and fruit can be frozen for later use. Some veges, like beans, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, carrots and peas, are best blanched, or dipped in boiling water, then cold water, before freezing. Others, like chillies, can be frozen as is. Stewed fruit for cooking freezes well as do all berries (don't wash blueberries first as it causes the skins to harden). Only freeze ripe fruit or it can taste bitter when thawed.

Storing preserves

Most preserves will keep safely for up to a year in a cool, dry place out of the sun. Because of its high sugar content and the acidity in fruit, jam can theoretically be kept out of the fridge once opened provided you use a clean spoon or knife to spread it. This will also stop it hardening when chilled. You might have to be prepared, however, for an infestation of ants. The acidity in vinegar is the preservative ingredient in chutneys and pickles, but again these should go into the fridge once that lid has been popped. If in any doubt about the keeping quality of your preserves, or you are making them in very small quantities, store them in the fridge.

Removing labels

Sticky labels are readily available and can be customised with fancy lettering and illustrations. If you're going to reuse old jars, though, the modern adhesives in them can make them a devil to remove. We have found De-Solv-It, a citrus-based solvent, brilliant for removing any label and its residue. Simply apply, wait a few minutes, remove and clean with hot, soapy water. If you don't want to use solvent, try soaking jars in cold water overnight, or submerging in cold water in a pan, then bringing to the boil. Your label *should* then rub off easily.



Rather than buying pectin, try making your own.

Take the peel, pips and core of a few (high-pectin) apples or quinces. Put in a saucepan and boil for 15 minutes or so. Strain, cool and use the resulting pectin solution when making jams with low-pectin fruit which might otherwise not set, such as berries, cherries or figs.

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